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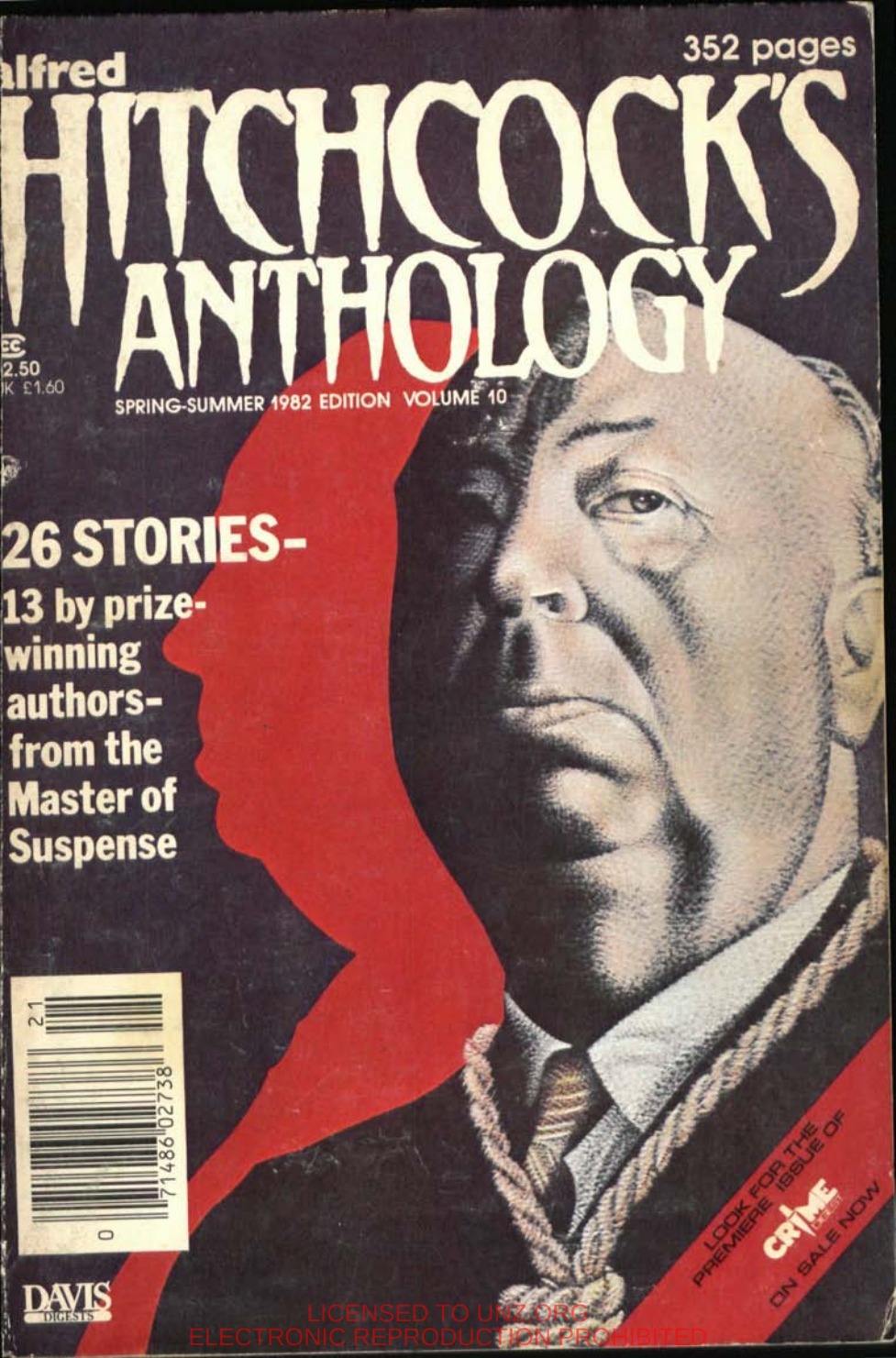

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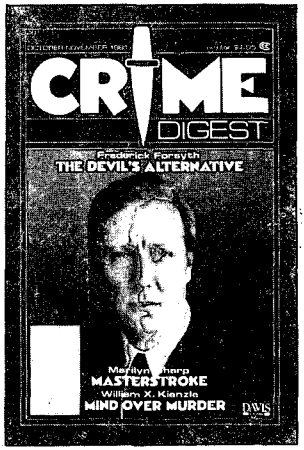

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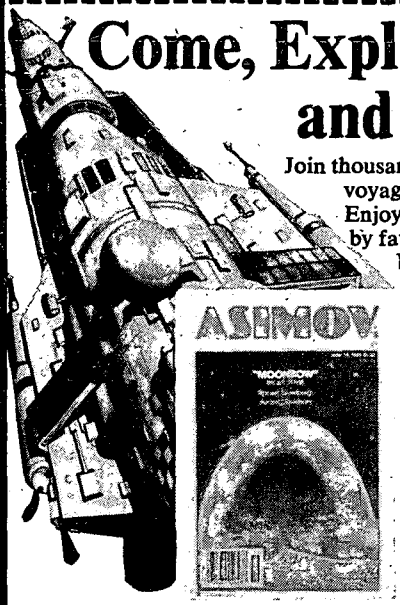

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Alfred

Hitchcock's Anthology

VOLUME 10

Edited by **ELEANOR SULLIVAN**

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017

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Introduction

In June 1981, a story by Frank Sisk titled "A Visit with Montezuma" won first prize in the Short Story Contest sponsored by the Swedish Academy of Detection at the Third International Congress of Crime Writers in Stockholm. Additional prizes were awarded to Edward D. Hoch and Lawrence Treat.

It was not the first such recognition either for Mr. Treat, who in 1977 received a special Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America for his contribution as editor of *The Mystery Writer's Handbook*, or for Mr. Hoch, who received an Edgar for his short story, "The Oblong Room," in 1967.

Earlier in June of 1981, at the annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner in New York, Clark Howard won the Edgar for best short story of 1980 ("Horn Man," *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine)* with Scrolls going to John Lutz (for "Until You Are Dead," *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine),* William Bankier (for "The Choirboy," *AHMM*), and Edward D. Hoch (for "The Most Dangerous Man Alive," *EQMM*).

In previous years, MWA has honored other contributors to this new anthology from Alfred Hitchcock (who himself won a Raven from MWA for his contribution to the mystery field): Henry Slesar (the Edgar for his novel, *The Grey Flannel Shroud*, 1959), William Link and Richard Levinson (the Edgar for best TV program of 1979, *Murder by Natural Causes*, CBS), Babs H. Deal (a Scroll for her novel, *Fancy's Knell*, 1966), Ron Goulart (a Scroll for his novel, *After Things Fell Apart*, 1970), Lawrence Block (a Scroll for his novel, *Time To Murder and Create*, 1977), Donald Honig (a Scroll for his short story, "A Real Live Murderer," 1960), and Jack Ritchie (Scrolls for two short stories, "The Many-Flavored Crime," 1975, and "Nobody Tells Me Anything," 1976). Clark Howard and Lawrence Treat have also won Scrolls from the Mystery Writers of America.

And so half of the stories in this collection were written by prize-winning mystery writers—but all of the stories were selected because they have won high marks of approval from readers of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*.

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Shattered Rainbow

by Edward D. Hoch

O'Bannion quit his job at three o'clock on a sunny Friday afternoon in April. It happened suddenly, though certainly he had considered the possibility many times in the past. It happened with words, a pounding fist, and then the decision that could not be recalled. It happened, oddly enough, on the same day that a man called Green robbed and killed an armed messenger for the Jewelers' Exchange.

O'Bannion, who had never heard of Green, spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning out his desk, separating the few personal possessions into a home-bound pile. When his secretary returned with her afternoon coffee she asked him what he was doing, though it must have been obvious.

"I finally did it, Shirl," he told her. "I walked out on the old man."

She sat down hard, the coffee forgotten. "You mean you quit?" she asked, still not quite able to grasp it.

"I quit. Walked out while he was still swearing at me. Now if I can just pack my briefcase and make it to the elevator before he comes after me, I really will have quit."

"What will you do?"

"I'm sure I won't sit around the house feeling sorry for myself. This is the best thing that could have happened to me." It sounded properly convincing, even to him.

He zipped shut the briefcase and told her goodbye. There was no sense being emotional about it at that point. "Goodbye, Mr. O'Bannion," she called after him. "Let me know when you get settled."

"Sure. Sure I will."

He rode down in the elevator with an afternoon's assortment of secretaries bound for coffee and businessmen bound for martinis, but he no longer felt a part of them. The cut-off had been too clean, too certain. He was a man without a job, and he wondered how he would tell his wife.

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Kate and the kids were still out shopping when he reached home just before five o'clock. He hung his raincoat carefully in the closet and mixed himself a drink. It was the first time he'd drunk before dinner in years, but he felt as if he needed one.

Kate came in as he was pouring the second.

"Dave. What are you doing home so early?"

"I quit my job. Finally walked out on the old guy."

"Oh, Dave—"

"Don't worry, honey. I'll have another one by Monday morning. I've still got a few contacts around town."

"Who? Harry Rider?"

"I might call Harry."

"I wish you hadn't done it. That temper of yours, Dave—"

"We'll make out. We always have." Then, because he'd only just thought of them, "Where are the kids?"

"Outside playing."

"We won't tell them for a few days. They needn't know over the weekend, at least."

"All right, Dave."

"Want a drink?"

"I want you to tell me about it, how it happened."

He told her about it. They talked for the better part of an hour, until the two boys came running in for supper. Then they ate as if nothing at all had happened, as if it were a Friday night just like any other. But it wasn't, and he noticed toward the end of the meal that he was speaking more kindly to the children than he usually did. Perhaps he was beginning to feel a bit guilty.

After supper, when the boys were being tucked into bed by Kate, he phoned Harry Rider.

"Harry? How are you, boy? This is Dave O'Bannion."

The voice that answered him was sleepy with uncertainty. He'd forgotten that Harry Rider always napped after dinner. "Yes, Dave? How've you been?"

"Pretty good. Look, Harry—"

"Yes?"

"Harry, I quit my job this afternoon."

"Oh? Kind of sudden, wasn't it?"

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"I'd been thinking about it for a while. Anyway, I'm looking, if you know of anything around town."

There was a moment of silence on the other end of the line. Then Harry Rider said, "Gosh, fella, I don't think I could help you right now. Maybe something will turn up though."

"Well, if you hear of anything, Harry—"

"Sure. I'll keep you in mind. Glad you called."

After he hung up, O'Bannion sat for some moments smoking a cigarette. When Kate came back downstairs, he was ready for the expected questioning look. "I heard you talking."

"I phoned Rider."

"Why?"

"Why not? He's got a lot of contacts around this town."

"All the wrong kind."

"Maybe in a few weeks I won't be so fussy."

"Can't you get unemployment insurance or something?"

"Not right away. I wasn't fired, remember. I walked out."

"But Harry Rider! He never did a favor for anybody in his life that didn't have a dozen strings attached."

"You didn't used to think he was so bad, back before we were married."

"That was before we were married. A lot of things were different then, Dave."

He lit a cigarette and started pacing the floor. "Anyway, you don't have to worry. He didn't have anything for me."

She shook her head as if to clear it. "Oh, I'm sorry. I guess the whole thing is just too much for me all at once."

"Just stop worrying. I'll have a job by the end of next week and a better one than I left. You can bet on it!"

She smiled at his words, even though neither of them felt quite that optimistic. They both knew it would be a long weekend.

Monday morning was warm and rainy, with a west wind blowing the drops of rain against the front windows with disturbing force. O'Bannion gazed out at it unhappily. It would not be a pleasant day to be trudging the streets of the city in search of a job. The kids, not yet old enough to attend school, were cross with the prospect of a day indoors, and he could see that Kate was already tense.

"Cheer up, honey. I'll phone you after lunch."

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"Where are you going to try?"

"Oh, there are a few offices around town that might have openings, especially for someone who walked out on the old man. I'll hit those today and tomorrow, and if the scent is cold I can always try an employment agency."

He went off in the car because Kate wouldn't be needing it and he wasn't quite up to facing the ride in on the same old commuters' train. It was still too early in the day, and there would be people he knew, people he wasn't yet in the mood to chat with. In the city, he parked the car at the ramp garage he occasionally used, nodding silently in reply to the attendant's cheerful morning greeting.

The first place he tried was an engineering firm where he had contacts. He thought. They listened in friendly agreement to everything he said, and one of them even offered to buy him lunch. But there was no job available and he wasn't yet ready to accept charity. He thanked them and went and bought his lunch from a white-coated sidewalk vendor who sold dry ham sandwiches wrapped in wax paper. He found an empty bench in the park and ate among the damp trees, thankful at least that the rain had stopped and the wind had died to a gentle breeze.

The job he'd left, O'Bannion was beginning to realize, had done little to prepare him for the necessity of stepping quickly into something else. He'd never had any opportunity to build upon some sketchy engineering courses he'd left unfinished at college. The job, for all its nine-thousand-a-year salary, had been little more than an arduous managership of an office full of unmarried and just-married girls more intent on dates and marriage than work.

He called on two other places that afternoon, and the best he came up with was a promise of something "maybe in a month or two." That wasn't good enough. He was already more depressed than he cared to admit to Kate.

Tuesday was much the same, and Wednesday. That afternoon, he swallowed his pride and called the familiar number of his old office. He got by the switchboard operator without being recognized and in a moment he was talking to Shirl.

"This is Dave. How are you?"

"Mr. O'Bannion! I'm fine, how are you? Everyone's been asking about you."

"I'll bet. Who are you working for now?"

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"They have me in the pool till they get someone to replace you. Have you found anything yet?"

"Not yet. I've got a couple of leads. What I called for—has there been any mail for me? Anything personal?"

"Just the usual junk, Mr. O'Bannion. Except this morning a letter came for you from California. Los Angeles. It looks as if it might be personal."

"It is." He had some friends in Los Angeles who often misplaced his home address and wrote him at the office.

"Should I forward it?"

"I suppose so," he said, and then had a second thought. "Say, would you like to meet me for a drink after work? I could get the letter from you and you could tell me what's been going on."

She hesitated a moment, but finally agreed. "All right. I guess I'd have time for one."

"Fine. I'll see you at five—a bit after five—over at the Nightcap." He hung up and then phoned Kate to tell her he'd be a bit late for dinner.

By the flickering candlelight of the Nightcap, a quiet little place where it seemed always to be the cocktail hour, he really looked at Shirl Webster for the first time. She'd been his secretary for the better part of the past year, but in that dubious manner of modern business he'd tended to take her mostly for granted. She was nothing more than an impersonal machine to take his letters and dictation, answer his phone, and perhaps suggest a birthday present for his wife. He'd never really thought of Shirl Webster as a woman, though he was aware now that she was surely a woman, and a striking one at that.

"I'm sorry it all happened," she said, seeming to mean it. "I liked working for you."

He noticed for the first time that her eyes were blue, a very light blue in sharp contrast to the dark of her hair. She was a tall girl, perhaps nearing thirty with a certain regal grace about her. "I'm glad of that, at least," he said with a chuckle. "There were days when I thought the whole place was in league against me, including you."

She shook her head. "Not at all. I was kept busy all day Monday explaining what had happened to you. All the girls miss you."

"Makes me sound like a bluebeard or something." He sipped the martini in front of him. "Do you have that letter?"

She nodded and handed over a flat envelope with a Los Angeles post-

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mark. He pardoned himself and slit it open, just to make sure the news was nothing more urgent than weather and kids and when-are-you-coming-to-visit-us. Then he folded it away in his inside pocket.

"Nothing important?" she asked.

"The usual stuff. They're old friends. I'll have to write them, tell them about my new status."

"Do these leads of yours sound good, Mr. O'Bannion?"

"I'm not your boss any more. Call me Dave."

"All right—Dave."

"To answer your question, no—the leads don't sound good."

"Maybe the old man would take you back. He's having a hard time replacing you."

"I have a little pride left, unfortunately. Want another drink?"

For a moment he thought she'd agree, but then she shook her head reluctantly. "I have to get home."

He realized that in almost a year he'd never even thought where home might be. "Got a boy friend, Shirl?"

She blinked at him. "I'm too old to call them boy friends any more."

"Oh, come on! How old are you—twenty-five?" He'd knocked a few years off his real guess.

"You're sweet. Now I really have to go. But keep in touch, let me know how you're doing."

"I will."

He watched her walk to the door, hips tight against the contoured fabric of her skirt, and he wondered why he'd never noticed that walk before.

Thursday was too nice a day to be out of work. It was fine to walk along Main Street on your lunch hour and moan about having to return to a desk on such a beautiful day, but O'Bannion quickly discovered it was only frustrating to be job-hunting on such a day. The trees in the park were already blossoming with spring, and the people he passed were smiling. He would have felt happier in a thunderstorm.

Friday was more of the same. An offer of a job at a thousand dollars a year less than he'd been making, a promise of something "maybe in the summer," a regret for a position just filled. It all added up to a big zero.

On Saturday morning he went to see Harry Rider. He knew the man would be at work on a Saturday because the tracks were racing. Harry's

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main source of income demanded a six-day week. He was a big man, with a face and hairline that made it difficult for O'Bannion to remember him as Kate's one-time suitor. The years had changed them all, but none more so than Harry Rider.

"What can I do for you, Dave?" he asked, not bothering to rise from behind the wide desk strewn with typewritten sheets, racing forms, and three telephones.

O'Bannion stared at the thinning hair, the wrinkles of tired skin around deep, calculating brown eyes, and said, "I phoned you last week. Maybe you forgot."

"Oh! Sure, I remember now. You're out of a job."

"That's it. I've got some good leads in town, but you know how it is when you just walk out on something. No two weeks' pay or anything like that."

"Need ten bucks?" Harry Rider was already reaching for his pocket. The words, coupled with the motion, made O'Bannion suddenly ill. He was sorry he'd come.

"No, no—nothing like that. I was wondering if you knew of anything around here. Even something temporary. You said once you had a lot of influence in the right places and just to come see you."

"Sure. I can get you a job cleaning out the stables up at Yonkers. How's that?"

O'Bannion's face froze. "I didn't come here for that sort of talk, Rider."

"Just kidding. Never take me serious! Ask Kate. She never took me serious."

"We weren't discussing Kate."

"Sure, sure. She know you came to see me?"

"No."

"Just as well."

"I intend to tell her when I get home. I have no secrets from her."

Harry Rider chuckled. "Maybe it's time you started having a few."

He could see he was getting nowhere with the man. There was no job in the offing, only this opportunity for ridicule. "I'm sorry to take up your time," he told Rider, rising from the chair.

"Wait a minute! Maybe I'll hear of something in your line."

"Thanks. Don't trouble yourself."

He was going out the door when Rider called after him, "I'll be in touch with you, Dave."

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O'Bannion didn't bother to answer.

On Sunday he went to church for the first time in a year. Listening to the minister rant about the evils of overabundance, he wondered why he'd bothered. The previous evening he'd told Kate about his visit to Harry Rider. She reacted about as he expected and there had been an unpleasant scene. She hadn't accompanied him to church on Sunday, and when he returned to the house he found her mood had not improved.

"It's a nice day," he said, to make conversation.

"Just great."

"Still upset because I went to Rider?"

"Why shouldn't I be? Dave, there are employment agencies, friends, relatives—why go to Harry Rider for a job?"

"I didn't know you felt that strongly about it."

"You knew—you knew darned well. I have a little pride left, even if you haven't."

Anger growing within him, he spun around and started from the room. Then he paused to face her once more. "Do you happen to know how much we have in the bank? I figure it's just about enough to keep us going for another three weeks. Then we either stop eating or stop paying on the house and car."

Her lips were a thin line of—what? It almost could have been contempt. "Maybe you should have thought about the money before you quit your job," she snapped.

"Sure, sure! Maybe I—" The ringing of the telephone cut into any retort he would have made. He decided it was probably just as well and went to answer it.

"Is this Mr. Dave O'Bannion?" a strange voice asked. Male, perhaps a bit muffled.

"Yes."

"Mr. O'Bannion, I understand you are presently at liberty. I have a position available, temporary work, which I'd like to discuss with you."

"Sure. Who is this calling?"

"My name is Green. Could you meet me tomorrow to talk it over?"

"Certainly. Where are you located?"

"I'll be in Room 344 at the Ames Hotel, anytime after ten. It must be tomorrow, though, as I'm leaving for Canada on Tuesday."

O'Bannion assured him it would be tomorrow. Even this mysterious

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temporary sort of job was worth looking into. But when Kate questioned him about the call he implied it was from someone he knew, someone he'd contacted the previous week. He had a growing feeling in the pit of his stomach that the strange Mr. Green in his hotel-room office would prove somehow to be an associate of Harry Rider.

Green, if that was really his name, proved to be a tall man in his mid-thirties. He didn't really belong in the hotel room. He seemed more like a man made for the outdoors, a man who might venture inside only for a drink or necessary food. He was obviously ill at ease in the surroundings of impersonal luxury such as one found at the Ames.

"You're O'Bannion?" he asked, frowning as if he might have expected someone older.

"That's right." He held out his hand and Green shook it. Then they both sat down and O'Bannion added, "You have a job open?"

Green leaned back in his chair. "A temporary position. It would involve a trip to Canada."

"For how long a period? I wouldn't want to be away from my family." He said the words because they sounded right. Just at the moment Kate and the boys were far from his thoughts.

"Only a day or two. And the pay would be good."

"How good?"

The man shrugged. "Perhaps five thousand dollars."

His worst fears realized, O'Bannion got suddenly to his feet. "I guess you'd better tell Mr. Rider I'm not interested."

"Who?"

Why had he gone? Why had he gone to Rider when he'd known all along that this would be the only sort of job the man could offer? Across the border for five thousand dollars.

"Harry Rider. I believe that's a name you know."

Green was blocking him at the door, holding him back. "Wait, wait. Look, there's no risk, if that's what's worrying you. It's safe."

"Sure."

"I'll give you something to take with you. All you do is deliver it to an address in Toronto and you'll be paid the money."

"Five thousand dollars for no risk? Why don't you take it yourself?"

Green was nervous now, unsure of himself. "All right," he decided suddenly. "I guess I got the wrong guy. Go!"

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O'Bannion went.

The remainder of the day he spent in a sort of twilight, wandering from office to office, filling out applications for jobs he neither wanted nor qualified for, existing in a world of mere minutes adding up slowly to hours. Again and again his thoughts returned to the man in the hotel room, to the five thousand dollars he'd offered for the flight to Canada.

O'Bannion tried to guess what would have been involved. Harry Rider's interests were mainly gambling, horse racing, and the like, although he occasionally dabbled in politics. Perhaps it was nothing more than transporting betting slips or some political material.

The afternoon was sunny, even now when it was almost ended, even with its twilight rays filtered through the blossoming branches of the park trees. He walked with a lengthened, broken shadow behind him, destination undetermined. Then, the random thought just crossing his mind, he started down the street toward his old office. They'd be leaving now, not a minute too early because the old man was always watching, but not a minute too late either. He stood in the shadow of a building, watching faces and figures already receding from memory after only a week's time. Then he saw Shirl Webster, walking very quickly along the curb, head down against the sunset.

O'Bannion crossed the street and intercepted her at the next stoplight. "Hello, Shirl," he called from a few paces behind her.

"Dave! I mean—"

"I told you Dave was all right. How are you?"

"Fine. I was just this minute thinking about you, wondering how you were coming along."

"Got time for a drink?" he asked, and as the words left his mouth he wondered just how accidental this meeting had been. Didn't he subconsciously seek her out rather than return home to Kate?

"Just one. I have to meet my boy friend."

He chuckled. "I thought you were too old to call them that."

"On days like this I feel younger. We going to the Nightcap again?"

"Why not?"

Over a drink, with the candle flickering on the table between them, he suddenly found himself telling her about his interview with Green in the hotel room. It was an odd sort of feeling she gave him and he wondered

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how he could have worked with her all those months without being affected by the sensuality of her presence.

"So you walked out on him," she summed up, making it a simple statement.

"I walked out on him. Wouldn't you?"

She toyed with the plastic stirring rod from her scotch-and-water. "I don't know. Five thousand dollars is more money than I make in a whole year. I don't know what I'd have done."

"It's obviously something crooked, with Rider involved."

She frowned into the glass. "The Rider you mention—if he *is* such a shady character, why did you go to him in the first place?"

Why? It was the sort of question Kate had asked too. *Why?* Was it purely a spirit of revolt against his wife's wishes, or was there more to it than that? "I don't know why," he answered finally. "Not really."

He lit her cigarette and watched while she settled back in her chair. "I think you're like me, Dave. I think you're sick of working your life away for someone like the old man, who doesn't care about anything but the profit and the ovehead."

"You think I should have done it? What Green wanted me to do?"

"I don't know. I think you should have asked a few more questions, thought about it a little more."

"I don't know. I just don't know." He signaled the waiter for another drink.

"Are you going to discuss it with you wife?"

"How can I? She's already barely speaking to me because I went to Rider. Am I going to tell her now that she was right all along about him being a crook?"

"Are you asking me what you should do, Dave?"

He wasn't really. Until that moment he'd been convinced that he'd followed the right course of action. Now she had planted a doubt. "You'd have asked more questions."

"Go back and see him again, Dave. Why not?"

"He's gone. On his way to Canada."

"Maybe not. He might be looking for someone else to make the trip."

"I'm sure he wouldn't be sitting in that hotel room still. How'd he know I wouldn't come back with the police?"

"What could you tell the police? What do you know to tell them?"

"Nothing," he admitted glumly.

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"Let me call the hotel for you, see if he's still there."

"I don't know. I'm getting in so deep—"

"It's a great deal of money, Dave. Enough to carry you over till you can find a really good job."

"Well, I suppose you could call. I know he won't be there."

She rose from her chair. "You said it was the Ames Hotel?"

"Yes."

She stepped into a phone booth near the door and he watched her dialing the number. She spoke a few words and then motioned quickly to him. When he joined her at the booth door she covered the receiver with her hand and said, "He's still there. I've got him on the line. You want to go over?"

"I—" He felt suddenly weak in the knees.

"Mr. Green," she said, returning to the phone. "I'm calling for Dave O'Bannion. He was up to see you this morning. Yes—Yes. Well, he'd like to reconsider your offer."

O'Bannion started to protest and then changed his mind. Well, why not? It was five thousand dollars, wasn't it?

He took the phone from her and heard the familiar voice of Green in his ear. "I'm glad you've reconsidered."

"Yes."

"You just caught me as I was checking out."

O'Bannion grunted.

"Can we meet someplace else? How about the park behind the library?"

"All right. What time?"

"It's almost six-thirty now. Make it seven o'clock."

"Fine. I'll be there."

"Alone."

"All right," O'Bannion agreed without hesitation. He hadn't even thought about taking Shirl with him.

He hung up and joined her back at the table. "All set, Dave?"

"All set. But he wants me to come alone."

"Oh." She seemed disappointed.

"I could meet you back here after if you'd like."

His words brought a smile to her lips. "I'd like."

"What about that boy friend?"

"I'll call him."

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He tossed a couple of bills on the table. "Get yourself something to eat. I'll be back in an hour or so. Maybe sooner."

He left her and walked across the street to another bar. There he had a quick drink and phoned Kate at home, making some excuse about a possible job that sounded phoney even to his own ears. Then he started for the little park behind the library, his heart beating with growing excitement. He didn't know whether the excitement was caused by Green or Shirl or both. He only knew that Kate had no part in it.

The park was almost dark by seven, lit only by the random lamps in standards twined by ivy. It was a lunchtime spot for summer secretaries, a strolling place for evening couples, a clubhouse for after-dark drifters. Though he was only a hundred feet from the street O'Bannion still had a sense of fear.

He found Green lounging on a bird-specked bench deep in shadow, his eyes caught by a necking couple across the path. "Look at that," he said to O'Bannion. "At seven o'clock."

"Yeah."

"Cigarette?"

"I've got my own, thanks."

"Who was the girl?"

"My secretary."

"I thought you were out of a job."

"She used to be my secretary."

"Oh."

"Now what about this deal?"

Green was grinning in the flare of his match. "You're ready?"

"I'm ready."

"All right. I have a plane ticket here, round trip to Toronto, leaving tomorrow night at six."

"That's pretty short notice. How long will I have to be away?"

"A day. You can fly back Wednesday night if you want."

O'Bannion ground out his cigarette and lit a fresh one. The couple on the opposite bench had unclinched and she was repairing her lipstick. "What's the catch? What do I have to do? What's the deal?"

"Take a box of candy to a friend of mine."

O'Bannion's hands were steady. "What else?"

"That's all. I'll be there myself to pay you the five thousand."

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"If you're going up too, why not take the candy yourself?"

Green smiled slightly and in the dim light he looked suddenly younger—no older perhaps than O'Bannion. "We don't need to kid each other. I've had trouble with the police. They might stop me at the border. I'm going up on the Thruway and crossing at Niagara Falls. I don't want them to find anything on me."

"What is it?"

Green looked vague. "That would be telling. You only get the money if the box is delivered intact."

It was now or never. This was the moment to back out, to go no further. But instead he simply asked, "As long as it's not narcotics. I don't want any part of something like that. O.K.?"

"No narcotics. What do you take me for anyway?"

"When do I get the box of candy?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, four o'clock. Right here."

"That doesn't give me much time to catch the plane."

"I don't want you to have much time. The man will be waiting for you at the airport in Toronto. You give him the candy and then get a room for the night. I'll probably pull in Wednesday morning and pay you off."

"How about part of it now?"

Green frowned. "I don't have it. The money's in Toronto. And there's no money unless you produce the box, unopened."

"Why don't you just mail it to him?"

"He's had police trouble too. They might be watching for something in the mails."

"All right," O'Bannon agreed at last. "I'll see you here at four."

Green left first, walking away fast. O'Bannion watched him go, watched him as in a dream, and wondered what he was getting into. He felt, in that moment, like a man trapped in a muddy bog. There was only Kate to save him, Kate and the children, and they were a world away. Then he remembered Shirl Webster waiting back at the bar and his spirits lifted.

"Why don't you come with me?" O'Bannion asked after he'd finished telling Shirl about his conversation with Green.

"What? Go *with* you! That's crazy, Dave. What would people say?"

"Who needs to know?"

It was crazy, but he began to think it might not be too crazy. He'd

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always been faithful to Kate in the nine years of their marriage—always, that is, except once in Boston with a girl he met in a bar. But now something had changed, something in him, or in Kate, or just in the times.

They talked, debated, argued for the rest of the evening, but he already knew she'd be on the plane with him.

His excuses to Kate in the morning were vague and uncertain. He would be away overnight, up in—Boston seeing about a job, a really good one right in his line. It was a damp, almost rainy day and the hours dragged till four and he met a trenchcoated Green in the park.

"Think the planes will be flying?" he asked.

Green handed over the candy, a great flat box with a ribbon tied around it. "Of course the planes'll be flying. A little rain never stopped them."

"This man will be at the airport?"

"He'll be there."

"How will I know him?"

Green thought for a moment. "His name is Dufaus. He has a little mustache and he's always carrying a briefcase. Looks like a government bigwig."

"All right. What about you?"

"I'll see you sometime before noon. I plan to drive all night. There's a little motel near the airport. Wait there for me."

"How do I know you'll show up?"

Green turned away. "Don't worry. I'm trusting you, you can trust me."

"Will Rider be there too?" O'Bannion asked on an impulse.

"Don't you worry about Rider. He takes care of himself."

Overhead, an unseen jet could be heard through the clouds. The planes were flying.

They held hands all the way.

It reminded O'Bannion of a youthful night on a hayride when he'd dated the most popular girl in the senior class for the first time. He'd held hands that night too, thinking and plotting all the way about how he'd work up to that first kiss, that first hand around her shoulders, on her knee. That night had ended disastrously, with the girl going home in a quarterback's car while O'Bannion sat alone behind the barn and

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cried for the first time in years. A year later, in college, he'd met Kate and there'd never been anyone else. Not really.

The weather was cooler when they landed, a clear coolness you didn't really mind. Above them the sky was full of stars and ahead he could see the flashing red-neoned MOTEL. The letters fuzzed and flickered irregularly as if the sign were tired. There to meet them at the airport was the mustached man with the briefcase, Mr. Dufaus.

He waited until they'd cleared customs and then he came up smiling. "Ah! O'Bannion?"

"That's right. You must be Dufaus."

"Correct. Quite correct. I have a car waiting. This way."

They followed him to a black foreign-built automobile with low, expensive lines. He motioned O'Bannion into the front seat with him but made no effort to start the car. Instead, he held out his hand. "The candy, please."

"No," O'Bannion said, halfway into the car.

"What?"

"No."

"What do you mean?"

"No candy until I get my money." O'Bannion hadn't really planned it that way, but suddenly he had spoken the words and there was no recalling them.

"You'll get the money tomorrow. Didn't he tell you?"

"He told me. You'll get the candy tomorrow."

Through all of this Shirl had stood behind him on the sidewalk. Now she tried to pull him from the car. "Dave, be careful."

O'Bannion backed out of the car, still clutching the candy box. "I'll be at the motel," he told Dufaus. "See you in the morning."

The man with the mustache was visibly upset. "The money cannot possibly be ready until I've had time to inspect the merchandise."

"Too bad. I'm sure we can work it out in the morning."

O'Bannion slammed the car door and walked quickly away, half pulling Shirl along with him. Dufaus made no attempt to follow.

"Dave, why did you do that? What's the matter with you all of a sudden?"

"Nothing. I just realized that I haven't decided about this thing yet, not really. I want more time to think. A few hours ago we were in New

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York, a few days ago I was still an honest man, and a few weeks ago I still had a job. Things are moving too fast for me. Too fast."

"Life is fast. We live and die before we know it, much too fast."

"Not by tomorrow morning. It's not over that fast. Let Dufaus sweat about it overnight. If this thing I'm carrying is so valuable, maybe I want to keep it a while."

They'd reached the motel, a low, long building of concrete that seemed about to crumble. The manager gave barely a flicker when they checked into a double room.

"What now?" she asked when they were alone.

"First things first. I'm going to check this candy. They didn't give me a chance before. I suppose that's why Dufaus risked meeting me at the airport—to get the candy before I had an opportunity to exercise my curiosity."

He removed the garish ribbon and lifted the lid, to disclose the regular designs of foil-wrapped chocolates. "Nothing but candy," Shirl observed over his shoulder.

"Maybe."

He unwrapped a piece and studied it. He squeezed with his fingers and broke it open. Inside, darkened and coated by the butterscotch filling, was something sharp and glittering in the light. "It's a—a jewel. Looks like a diamond. Still in its setting." He tried another piece of candy and it yielded up the red of a ruby.

"Dave, what is it?"

After the third one he answered, "It looks like part of a necklace of some sort. It's been broken at the links and separated into individual pieces so it could be hidden in the candy. Come on, help me look inside the others."

Ten minutes later, with all forty-eight pieces of candy broken open on the bed, they had a rainbow-colored collection of gems, each set in a glistening ring of platinum. "Who'd want to wear a thing like that?" Shirl asked, wide-eyed.

O'Bannion half remembered something he'd heard or read. "It's not for wearing, really. It's a necklace called the Rainbow and its gems are supposed to be worth a quarter of a million dollars. It was stolen a week ago from an armed messenger."

"You're sure?"

He nodded. "The messenger was killed. I'm into this a little deeper

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than I figured." He ran his palm across a forehead suddenly damp with sweat.

Later, sometime in the hours between midnight and dawn, when the only sound to be heard was the gentle buzz of the electric clock on the far wall Shirl said, "Do you think they'll come for us or something? Because you didn't give them the candy?"

He laughed and tried to sound amused. "You've been seeing too many movies, gal. Nothing's going to happen."

"They killed one man. You said so."

"Maybe I was wrong. Maybe these jewels are something else."

"You're not wrong, Dave. If you don't think anything's going to happen, why don't you come to bed?"

He laughed and lit a cigarette. "I don't know, maybe I'm shy." Then, after a moment's silence, "Tell me about this boy friend of yours, Shirl."

"He's just a guy."

"You like him? Well enough to marry him?"

"Would I be here with you if I did?"

"I don't know." He blew smoke in the direction of the window, watching it as it crossed the single bar of dimly filtered light from outside. "What are you going to tell him when you get back?"

"I'll think of something," she said. "More to the point, what are you going to tell Green and Dufaus in the morning?"

He thought about it for a long time before answering. "I think I'll go to the police, Shirl," he said finally.

"The police! But—but *why*?"

"This is murder. If I don't get out of it now, it may be too late."

"But what about *us*? What about your wife? Do you want it spread all over the newspapers that we were up here together?"

"No, of course not. But what else can I do?"

"Give them their foolish jewels and be done with it. Take the money and just forget about it. That's what you planned to do originally, isn't it?"

"I suppose so, but things have changed." Suddenly he ground out his cigarette. "All right, let's get out of here then. We'll get the jewels to the police somehow without implicating ourselves and be back in the States by noon."

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But she held him back with her hand. "No, Dave. I'm afraid to go out there. I'm afraid they'll be waiting for us."

"I'll take a look around," he said and slipped into his jacket.

Outside, the world was a pale dark landscape sleeping in the full moon's glow. A car was parked at the head of the driveway. A cigarette-tip glowed like a far-off star. O'Bannion sighed and went back inside.

"What is it, Dave?"

"You were right. He's got somebody watching the place." He looked out the back window, but decided against risking it with Shirl. There was a twenty-foot drop to the highway. They could hardly make it without a twisted ankle or worse.

"So?"

"So we stay till morning and see what happens."

The sun was back in the morning, already high in the sky by the time the car drew up outside. O'Bannion had been watching out the window. He saw Dufaus and Green join the man who had been watching the motel throughout the night.

"Here they come," he told Shirl without looking at her. "Green's with them."

She came up to the window and stood just behind O'Bannion, watching. "Give them the jewels, Dave. We don't want trouble."

Then they were at the door, knocking. He opened it and looked into Green's expectant eyes. "Well! I was worried when Mr. Dufaus told me about his troubles. Let's get this settled now."

The two of them crowded into the small room, leaving the third man to wait outside. Green said, "The candy. Where's the candy?"

"We were hungry. We ate it," O'Bannion told them.

Green's mouth twisted into an odd sort of grin. "Look, cut out the wise talk. You'll get your money as soon as Dufaus inspects the candy and gives me the O.K."

"I didn't know I was getting involved in a murder," O'Bannion said. "That wasn't part of the deal."

Dufaus was suddenly agitated. "He knows too much!"

Green's hand dropped to his pocket. "All right, we're finished fooling, O'Bannion. I didn't let you bring this stuff five hundred miles across the border just so you could double-cross me."

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His hand was coming out of the pocket when O'Bannion hit him, a glancing blow to the side to the head that tumbled him onto the bed.

Against the wall, Dufaus uttered a gasp of dismay. "No violence—please! I only want to purchase the gems!"

O'Bannion moved again, but this time Green was faster. The gun—a small .32—was out of his pocket, pointed at O'Bannion's middle. "We're through fooling," he growled. "Shirl, where did he hide the stuff?"

Behind him, as in a nightmare, O'Bannion heard her reply, "In the toilet tank. I'll get them." And then, almost as an afterthought, "I'm sorry, Dave. Really I am."

He sat on the bed, unfeeling, as Green and Dufaus counted the gems. And when she came to sit next to him it was as if a stranger had entered, a perplexing intruder.

"In the beginning I thought I was doing you a favor," she said quietly. "You needed the money and my boy friend—how I hate that expression—he needed someone to fly to Canada with the necklace. I talked him into calling you. I never thought it would come to this. I should have risked bringing the thing over myself."

"It wasn't Harry Rider," he said. That was all he could say.

"Not Rider, no. It was me. When you thought I was calling the hotel Monday night I was really calling Greeny's apartment. I was afraid you'd notice that I dialed the number without looking it up. I was afraid you'd notice Dufaus wasn't surprised to see me at the airport."

"I guess I didn't notice anything. Not a thing."

Green came over to the bed. "Dufaus is satisfied. Let's roll."

"A quarter of a million?" She breathed it, like a prayer.

"Not even half, but I can't stay to argue. It'll get us a long way."

"What about him?" Dufaus asked from the door, pointing at O'Bannion.

"That's five grand I saved myself," Green said. He brought the gun into view once more.

Shirl stepped quickly in front of him. "No, Greeny. No more killing." She held her position.

"I leave him here to tell the cops everything he knows?"

But Shirl stood firm. "He can't tell them anything without implicating himself, with the police, and with his wife. I don't think he wants to do that. Come on, let's get out of here."

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Green faced him with the gun for another moment, uncertain, and then pocketed it as he turned away. "All right, we'll leave him."

She came over O'Bannion one last time. "Dave?"

"What?"

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "When he gives me my cut I'll see you get something. A thousand or so anyway."

"Don't bother," he said, turning away.

"Dave—"

"Go on. Go!"

He heard them drive away, listened to the sound of traffic reaching him through the still-open door.

After a time he went out and walked until he found the motel manager, who was watering a spring garden by the highway. He asked where there was a telephone he could use and when he found it he dialed the number of the local police.

It would be a long journey back to Kate, and he wondered if he would make it.

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The Shoe Freak

by Stephen Wasylyk

A bombshell exploding on the front lawn couldn't have created greater excitement among the residents of the Golden Age Retirement Center than their discovery, upon arising, that a young woman, a nurse, had been found strangled on the green carpet of grass alongside the service driveway on the south side of the building.

They whispered, they buzzed, and they blanched with the notion that the madman who had murdered the girl might choose one of them next.

As Bakov said at breakfast in the dining hall, "We do not know if he specializes in young girls."

"The girl was not a resident," Morley pointed out. "Why should he bother the people who live here? A murderer usually has a reason. What reason could he have for bothering us? We have no money and the women are certainly not sex objects. I do not think that he will attack any of the people who live here."

"Nevertheless," Bakov said, "you know that many of us enjoy a walk in the evening before we go to bed. We cannot walk in the streets. It is too dangerous; therefore we walk on the grounds. Now that is taken away from us unless the murderer is caught. It will be better for everyone's peace of mind if he is found quickly."

Morley made a face and pushed his plate from him. "Prunes. Bah! Always prunes and cereal and weak coffee. I tell you, Bakov, if I had the money, I would eat elsewhere."

Bakov smiled at his breakfast partner. "I do not see you losing weight from this diet. True, it is not steak and potatoes but it keeps us alive. Can we ask for more?"

Morley pushed his chair back and stood up, a thin man with an unruly shock of wild white hair. "Let us go. The police want to talk to us in the recreation room. Perhaps we will get more information."

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Bakov grunted. "The police are looking for information. They will not give it out."

The recreation room was crowded when they arrived, the older and infirm residents seated at the card tables and on the sofas, the younger and healthier ones standing against the walls. None was less than sixty-five, some were in their nineties, their ages not indicative of their mobility. At seventy-five, Morley and Bakov fell into the median group, but both had retained the health and the physical condition of men much younger and were two of the most active residents of the home.

Morley could have passed for a man in his late fifties, one of those people who had always looked younger than he really was. Age had more of an effect on Bakov, depriving him of his hair and softening his muscles so that not only his face but his entire body seemed to sag.

They found a space against the wall and leaned back, looking expectantly at the two men in the center of the room. One was the director of the home, middle-aged and rotund, named Hill. The other was short, swarthy, and broad-shouldered, with black hair and a nose that had obviously once been broken. Surrounded by the fragile old people he gave the impression of a bull in a china shop and he moved carefully, as if he might break something.

"This is Sergeant Flipsky," Hill said. "He wants to talk to us about the unfortunate occurrence last night."

Flipsky cleared his throat nervously. "First, I want to reassure you all that there's nothing to worry about. As far as we can tell, it had nothing to do with anyone in the home. I understand that some people in the neighborhood have always used the service driveway to cut through the grounds to save a few steps. It looks like this is the case here. We found the young woman's purse. She didn't live far from here, so she used the driveway to avoid walking around the block, and someone caught her in the darkness. Now I understand all of you are supposed to be in bed by midnight but I also understand that many of you find difficulty in sleeping and may have been awake when this happened. I would like you to think back. You may have heard something or seen something unusual. If so, I'd like to hear it."

Morley coughed discreetly and held up a hand. "At what time did the girl die?"

Flipsky nodded. "Good question. As nearly as we can tell at the moment, she was attacked sometime about two-thirty."

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The room started to buzz with subdued conversation.

Flipsky raised a hand. "If any of you have anything to tell me, I'll be in the director's office."

He and Hill walked out of the room.

"I told you," Bakov said. "The police do not give out information."

Morley stroked his chin thoughtfully. "There is something strange here, Bakov."

"What is so strange about a girl being strangled in this day and age?"

"I think I had better talk to this Sergeant Flipsky."

"About what?"

"My arthritis. I did not sleep well last night."

"He will be interested in your arthritis?"

"No, in what I heard."

"What did you hear?"

"Nothing."

"He will be interested in nothing?"

"You will hear me explain."

They made their way through the people to Hill's office and pushed open the door. Evidently no one else had anything to say to Flipsky. Only he and Hill were seated by the desk.

Hill beckoned to Morley and Bakov. "Come in, gentlemen." He spoke to Flipsky. "This is Mr. Morley and Mr. Bakov. You couldn't have chosen a better pair for police cooperation. A short time ago they were instrumental in capturing a holdup man in the bank across the street. You may have heard about it."

"I remember," Flipsky said. "I hope they can help me. Did one of you hear something last night?"

Morley shook his head. "I heard nothing. That's why I came. At two-thirty I was awake, and I heard nothing."

Flipsky's smile faded. "Then why—"

"My room is on the south side of the building," Morley said. "From my window this morning I could see the police searching the area where you found the poor girl. It is not too great a distance, and that is the point. Since I was awake I should have heard *something*. My window was open and at night I can hear people walk on the gravel of the driveway. Last night I heard nothing."

"Which means?"

Morley shrugged. "I do not know what it means. You are the detective."

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Flipsky took a deep breath and forced a smile. "Thank you, gentlemen."

Morley and Bakov went out into the hall.

"I do not think your information made him excited," Bakov said.

"It is good information. It means something."

"What can it mean?"

"I do not know yet, but I will find out."

"Let us get our field glasses and go to our chairs," Bakov said. "It is almost time for the bikini woman in the apartment house across the street to come out on her balcony."

"Let her wait. There is something I want to see first."

Morley led Bakov out the rear entrance and down the graveled service driveway. The spot where the girl's body had been found was cordoned off by a waist-high rope and several policemen were still painstakingly searching the grass and the shrubbery.

Morley walked to the edge of the rope and studied the scene. "It is as I thought," he said.

Bakov sighed. "If you do not tell me, I will not know. I cannot read thoughts. If I could, I would have known my second wife would run off with the dress salesman from Newark." He shrugged. "Not that I would have tried to change her mind. I was glad to see her go."

"Forget your second wife and look at the ground. What do you see?"

"Grass and gravel," Bakov said promptly. "I see nothing else. Neither do the police or they would not be on their hands and knees searching. Does it make a difference?"

"Would you expect a young girl to be attacked and not struggle?"

"When I was young they struggled even if I did not attack."

"The gravel is smooth and there are no marks on the grass," Morley said. "There would have to be some marks. There is nothing."

"This means something to you?"

"I heard nothing and there are no marks. It means that the girl was not killed here. She was strangled somewhere else and her body placed here."

"Ah, now you are a detective. Tell me, Detective, do you not think the police have already figured this out?"

"I do not think so. The police are not the smartest people in the world."

Bakov shrugged. "So. It is none of our business. Let the police handle it. Stand here and play detective. My legs are tired. I am going to watch the woman in the bikini."

"Wait one moment."

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Morley approached one of the uniformed policemen who was crawling on his knees, peering beneath shrubbery. Morley went down on all fours beside him.

"Excuse me," he said. "What are you looking for? Perhaps I can help."

The policeman said, "I don't think we're allowed to say."

"Why not? Suppose I found what you are looking for and didn't know what it was? Could I tell you I had found it?"

The policeman rocked back on his heels and tilted his cap backward. "I never thought of that."

"Then think of it," Morley said. "Old men sometimes make sense."

"You'll tell no one I told you?"

Morley lifted a hand. "Not a word."

"A shoe," the policeman said. "One of the girl's shoes was missing. It's a white shoe with a hard rubber sole, the kind nurses sometimes wear."

"Ha!" Morley said. "I will keep my eyes open."

He pushed himself to his feet and joined Bakov as he waddled across the lawn.

"You see," he said triumphantly. "It is as I said. One of her shoes is missing and they are looking for it. They will not find it because it is not here."

"Then where is it?"

"Where she was killed. Perhaps it came off in the struggle." Morley stopped suddenly and struck his forehead with the palm of his hand. "I have it, Bakov! It is really very simple. What we have here is a case of shoe fetish."

Bakov stopped. "Shoe what?"

"Shoe fetish." Morley said grandly. "There are people like that. They fix their erotic impulses on an inanimate object. The man killed the girl to get her shoe. He is a shoe freak, that's what he is."

Bakov stared. "You mean he prefers a woman's shoe to a woman?"

"Something like that."

Bakov rolled his eyes. "Women's shoes I have seen, from pumps to open-toed sandals to wedgies to spike heels and pointed toes to what they wear today, and I tell you, Morley, you are crazy. No man could fall in love with a woman's shoe."

"I am right," insisted Morley. "This is a case of shoe fetish."

"No," Bakov said. "This is a case of a shoe falling off somewhere. The

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police will find it and you will see how wrong you are, Mr. McGarrett of *Hawaii Five-O*. I will watch the bikini woman. That makes more sense."

In a few minutes they were seated in their favorite beach chairs, two of the many lined up alongside the brick building on a stone patio, the broad lawn before them stretching to the wrought-iron fence and the street. Bakov held his field glasses to his eyes, studying the apartment house across the way. Morley held his in his lap, staring glumly at the people passing on the sidewalk.

"She is not there," Bakov said. "Do you suppose the morning is too cool?"

"Perhaps she has enough tan," Morley said morosely. "The woman is already the color of old leather."

Bakov nodded. "A real sun worshipper." He scanned the apartment-house façade with the glasses, saw something that interested him, and focussed the glasses carefully.

"That is very strange," he said slowly. "There is a young man on the sixth floor of the apartment house with field glasses like this and he is looking at us. What can he see in an old people's home? It is a waste of time. He should be looking at the bright young girls walking on the street."

Morley raised the powerful glasses he had bought with part of the reward he had won for capturing the bank-holdup man. He studied the apartment house.

"He is not looking at us," he announced. "He is watching the police search the grounds."

Bakov snorted. "If he is that interested, the lazy bum should come down and see for himself."

"Hmmm," Morley said thoughtfully.

"Why hmmm? It is a free country. All the police can do is tell him to move on."

"Maybe he doesn't want to be seen. Maybe he doesn't want the police to know he is interested."

"You are now talking again in riddles," Bakov accused him.

Morley stood up suddenly. "I think we should investigate that young man."

"Investigate? Investigate what? All he is doing is looking."

"I don't like the way he is looking. Suppose he is the murderer? Suppose

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he killed the girl in his apartment and carried her across the street and dropped her body? What then?"

"What then?" Bakov almost screamed. "You are talking nonsense! He is just a young man looking through field glasses and you have already made him a murderer!"

"I think he should be investigated and you and I should do it."

"Aha! Now you are Joe Mannix on TV. Tell the police, Mr. Mannix. Let them investigate. That is where our tax money goes so that they investigate when there is investigating to be done."

"Flipsky will not listen," Morley said stubbornly. "Just as he would not listen before. I am going. You yourself said it was necessary for the murderer to be found quickly. This may be an opportunity. Are you coming with me?"

"Me? I am no Ironside. I am a fat old man with bad legs but not yet in a wheelchair. What are you going to do?"

"Cross the street and go to his apartment. I will talk to him. I will also look around his apartment to see if the missing shoe is there. I will bet there are many missing shoes there. Even from this distance he looks like a shoe freak."

"You think he will let you do that?"

"He will not know what I am there for."

Bakov sighed. "There is no use talking to you when you get these wild ideas. You will go and you will get into trouble." He shrugged. "I suppose I will have to go along to see that you do not end up in jail."

They placed their field glasses in the safekeeping of the girl in the office, borrowed a clipboard and some paper, and walked across the street, Morley in the lead, turning to urge on the slower-moving Bakov.

They crossed the lobby and found an empty elevator. As it lifted them upward Bakov asked: "How are you going to get into the man's apartment?"

Morley smiled and held up the clipboard. "You will see."

"I will see you go to jail."

"No jail. One of the advantages of getting old, Bakov, is that you get smarter."

They slowly walked down the carpeted hallway counting the doorways. They paused before 617.

"This is it?" asked Bakov.

"I think so," Morley said. "We will see."

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He pushed at a button alongside the door. A buzzer sounded inside the apartment.

The door opened cautiously. A young man peered out, his long blond hair falling over his forehead, a scraggly moustache drooping beneath a hawkish nose. His eyes were heavy-lidded, as if he'd had little sleep the night before, and they stared at Morley resentfully.

"What do you want?"

Morley waved his clipboard. "We represent the management. We are taking a water survey."

"What in the hell is a water survey?"

"The water bill for this building has been too high lately. It is our duty to check all bathrooms and kitchens for dripping faucets."

The door started to close. "My faucets don't drip."

Morley braced a hand against the door. "We have to check. Even a small drip that you would not notice can be very costly. Think of it. Drip, drip, drip. Soon you have a pint, then a quart, then a gallon. Multiply that by a hundred and ten apartments. It is a lot of water. We must safeguard the management's investment. A bad washer here, a loose screw there and our profits go down the drain."

"I don't give a damn about that."

"You will care if we find it necessary to raise the rent."

The threat opened the door.

"All right," the young man said resignedly. "You can come in. Just get it over with and get out."

Morley motioned to Bakov. "Come along, Harry."

As they wended their way toward the bathroom, Bakov tugged at Morley's sleeve and whispered: "Who is Harry?"

"You want me to give him our real names? Besides, management representatives are always named Harry. It is a good name."

"How did you know he would let us in?"

"It is like the army," Morley said patiently. "With a clipboard and an official manner, you can go anywhere."

"You were in the army?"

"General Pershing could not have won without me," Morley said proudly.

They paused at the door to the bathroom. The apartment was small, really only one room that was a combination bedroom and sitting room, the bathroom opening from one corner, a tiny kitchenette from another.

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The place was a mess. The bed was unmade, covers dragged to the floor, a morning newspaper loosely scattered around the one soft chair.

Bakov tugged at Morley's sleeve again. "I see no shoes," he whispered.

"They are here," insisted Morley. "I just have to find them. Shoe freaks do not put them on display, you know. They keep them hidden, like private treasures."

The young man turned from the balcony and glared at them.

"Into the bathroom quickly," Morley said.

The bathroom sink dripped steadily. Morley tried to turn off the faucet. It had no effect. "In case he asks," he said, "you had better count the drops."

Bakov stared at him. "Count the drops?"

"For one minute. Then you know how many an hour and how many a day." He handed Bakov the clipboard. "Just put down some numbers. He won't know the difference."

"You will then know how much water is wasted?"

"I do not care how much water is wasted," Morley said impatiently. "It is only to look impressive if he asks." He peered around the bathroom door. "He is out on the balcony again with his glasses. I will check the apartment."

"He will see you."

"No," Morley said. "I was not a scout for General Pershing for nothing."

He dropped to his hands and knees and crawled toward the bed. Keeping the bed between himself and the balcony he crawled across the room, peering beneath the furniture and sneaking a look into the one closet. At the bed he paused and pulled the fallen covers aside.

Beneath the bed was a woman's white shoe.

Morley sucked in his breath sharply. He reached for the shoe, pulled it out, and started to retreat to the bathroom just as the young man on the balcony turned and saw him.

The young man leaped into the room. "Why are you crawling on my floor?" He saw the shoe in Morley's hand.

His face turned white. He cursed loudly and came across the room in long strides. He picked Morley up by the scruff of the neck and shook him. "You nosy old—"

The door buzzer sounded, loud and harsh. A fist banged heavily. A loud voice said: "Open up. This is the police. Open the door *now*."

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The young man let Morley go, leaped to the small kitchenette, opened a drawer, and drew out a long, wicked knife. He spun on Morley.

"Get your fat friend out here!" he screamed.

Bakov waddled out of the bathroom, his face as white as the young man's.

The young man's eyes bulged. They glowed and rolled as he glared from Bakov to Morley to the door. He reached for Morley's collar again, pulling him close, holding the knife inches away from his throat.

The police pounded on the door.

"Stop that!" shouted the young man. "Get away from that door! I have an old guy in here and I'll kill him if you don't go away!"

The pounding stopped.

Morley gulped, his eyes straining downward at the knife as if he could push it away with the weight of his stare.

Bakov stood absolutely still in the bathroom doorway, his mouth opening and closing slowly like a fish gasping for air.

"Open the door," the young man commanded Bakov.

Bakov swallowed hard, waddled to the door, and swung it open.

Flipsky and several uniformed policemen stood in the hallway.

"I'm coming out," the young man snarled. "And I'm leaving. If anyone tries to stop me, the old man gets it."

Flipsky and the policemen retreated watchfully and slowly a few feet down the hall.

The young man propelled Morley toward the door, the knife dropping away from Morley's throat for a moment.

Morley stumbled, regained his balance, and swung the shoe wildly at the man's hand. The shoe landed with a soft splat, the man yelped, and the knife dropped to the floor.

Still holding Morley's collar, he bent, reaching for the knife.

Bakov's hand came down on the man's neck in a vicious amateur karate chop. The young man grunted, went down, and stayed down as Flipsky and the policemen stood frozen.

In the silence, Bakov whimpered softly. "I think I broke my hand," he said.

Morley and Bakov sat in their beach chairs, looking out over the noontime crowds walking the street on the other side of the fence. Bakov

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cradled his right hand tenderly, the bandages gleaming white in the warm sunlight.

"Flipsky was very angry with us," Bakov said.

"Ha!" said Morley. "It is only because he is jealous that we solved the case before he did."

"He said he could arrest us for interfering in police business."

"He will not dare. The newspapers would be very upset, and what would they do with our TV interview? We are famous, Bakov, and famous people do not get arrested. Name one famous person who has been arrested."

"Flipsky didn't need our help. He found out about the young man at the hospital where the nurse worked. They told him she was dating this young attendant but the attendant didn't come to work today, and when Flipsky found he lived across the street from where the body was found he became very suspicious. It was lucky for us he did."

"It was as I thought," said Morley grandly. "They had an argument and he strangled her, then carried the body down the stairs and across the street and dumped her on our lawn. No one could see him at two-thirty in the morning."

"He remembered her purse but he never noticed her shoe came off in his apartment. He was wondering what the police were looking for. That's why he was using those binoculars, to find out."

"He is not a very smart young man. Even without our help, Flipsky would have caught him."

Bakov sighed and caressed his hand. "That karate looks so easy on TV. They never break *their* hands."

"They really do not hit each other," Morley explained. "You should have hit him with the clipboard."

"No. The clipboard would have broken and where would I get the money to replace it? My hand they fix for free. Medical attention is part of the agreement with the home."

He looked at Morley and smiled slyly. "Big detective. A regular Barnaby Jones. You said the shoe was missing because the murderer had a shoe fetish. Where is your shoe fetish now?"

"An investigator has to consider all possibilities," Morley said loftily. "But you know, Bakov, being a detective is very interesting. I think I would like to do more of it."

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"It is too dangerous." Bakov peered at Morley. "Tell the truth, Morley. When he had the knife at your throat, were you frightened?"

Morley sat for a long moment. "I think not," he said finally. "At my age, death does not frighten me too much."

"You would have missed all the bright young girls, I can tell you that."

"There are many of them out today." Morley lifted his glasses. "There is one crossing in front of the car-wash place now. The men are whistling at her."

Bakov raised his glasses with one hand. "She is very cute," he admitted. He held the glasses up for a long time. "Do you know, Morley, she is wearing the nicest pair of shoes I have seen in a long time."

Morley smiled. "Perhaps you are becoming a shoe freak. Would you like to steal one of her shoes?"

"I am afraid not." Bakov sighed heavily. "One exciting experience a day is enough for a man of my age."

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The House Guest

by Babs H. Deal

The lecture agency called on Tuesday and said they were sending this girl down that weekend. They didn't even ask me; just said they were sending her down. I always take them in though. When you're married to a man who had the fortune or misfortune to discover a new active agent for the medics to mess around with, you get used to people—all kinds of people—all wanting something. There are always a lot of girls.

I hadn't heard about this one before, but that didn't mean anything. The agency always has a few on hand doing busy work. This one probably needed a Florida vacation as much as the next one. We don't have any children and there's a good guest room, and I like to cook and make special drinks, so they don't bother me too much. I do get a little tired of Kramer's constant talk-talk-talk when they're here. The stories and theories may be all new to them, but I've had to hear them all a million times. I just sat on the terrace and cut my mind off and let it drift when he talked. That's what I used to do—cut and let drift, like the ocean out there.

This one was a publicity girl. Kramer went out to the airport and got her and I spent the time thinking up a special drink. It's something to do. I never drink anything but the best rum and soda myself, but I like to mess around with drinks. I tried something with bourbon and a liqueur, but it didn't come out to suit me; it wasn't at all pretty. So I threw it down the sink and started over and came up with a nice pink thing out of gin, grenadine, and white crème de menthe.

Then I heard them in the driveway and put the hors d'oeuvres in the oven. She was a good-looking girl, like they all are: brunette, tall, with good legs and one of those thinned-down bodies from starving herself to death like everybody in New York seems to do. I've never had to starve myself. I'm just naturally skinny. Not slim or slender, just skinny, and little too. It used to worry me, but I've gotten used to it. I wear my hair

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long and keep the clothes simple and everybody thinks I'm a lot younger than I am, which is definitely closer to forty than thirty. This girl was about twenty. She looked bright and efficient, and she shook hands like a man. I almost liked her.

We went out on the terrace and she took one of the drinks without saying anything cute about it. I was almost sorry for her having to listen to Kramer for the whole weekend, but she was polite enough to him. They always are at first. He's still a good-looking man, though he's started to go pretty bald and all the bounce and energy that used to seem exciting has degenerated into a bunch of annoying habits, like tapping his foot on the floor and snapping his fingers.

"Your ocean is wonderful," this girl said.

"Yes," I said. "I like it. I didn't when we first moved here. It used to drive me crazy. I'd wake up every time the tide changed. But now I can't stand getting away from the sound of the surf. You get attached to it."

"I can see you would," she said. "It must be like listening to rain when you're going off to sleep at night."

Well, when she said that Kramer leered at her, but she acted as though she didn't notice it. I used to wish he'd get enough of girls, just once, so I could have one around to talk to without him playing cavalier at them, but it isn't going to happen, of course. Not now.

I fixed them another drink and had one myself, and then I went to see about the supper. When I came back out Kramer was telling her about the first year after he discovered the mold or whatever, and she was hanging on it. It is a pretty interesting tale the first time you hear it, I guess, but he always brings in that awful place we were living in then, and makes me sound like Marie Curie stirring the pitchblende in the backyard.

"You ought to get more of that into your lectures," she said, earning her vacation.

"Oh, it really isn't very interesting," Kramer said.

"But it is," she said. "It's just like the—well, like the Curies."

She actually said it. Well, I guess it's all right; there was a time when I thought it was sort of like the Curies myself.

That was before all the publicity and the girls and the publicity girls—and the money. The money has been fun. It bought me that ocean out there, but it did things to Kramer. Maybe it did things to me too, only you can't see what's happening to yourself so well. I know what

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happened to Kramer. He got the idea he was the most important guy in the universe. He'd always had a tendency that way, but if all the publicity and the money hadn't come along he couldn't have convinced himself so thoroughly. He wouldn't have gotten so pontifical about it.

I brought the supper out and they ate. The girl, she was named Linda, ate everything. Kramer ate too. Sometimes he doesn't any more, but I am a good cook. It's about the only thing I am good at.

"Aren't you eating?" Linda said to me about halfway through her shrimp romelade.

"I never want much supper," I said.

I went up to bed early because I figured they wanted to talk business and I wasn't interested in that. I could still hear them on the terrace when I went to sleep. She had gotten out her briefcase and they were going over the new tour route for the lectures. I hoped Kramer didn't bore her to death.

The next day I took her away with me for lunch and let Kramer work on his lecture notes. We drove up to the next key and had lunch at a nice restaurant there. She bragged on the food, but said it wasn't as good as mine. I asked her all about her job and she told me. She made it interesting, and she was bright and clever. She reminded me of the way I used to be a long time ago in college.

That night I suggested we go to a place where there was an orchestra. That surprised old Kramer, I could see. I don't ever go out any more. I've gotten to where I like to go to bed early and listen to my ocean. He jumped on it and said, "Oh, great." I knew he wanted to dance with Linda. That was all right with me. Kramer can't dance. He thinks he's real good at it, but he never has learned how to lead.

We went out to the Beach Club where they have a good combo. Kramer danced with me once and with Linda once and then we just sat and drank and talked. They ordered martinis. I didn't blame them. The bartender wasn't really good at exotic drinks like I am.

I drank my rum and soda and watched all the people in the bar. All of them seemed to have something wrong with them. There was a woman in a sari and she was too fat; there was a tall beautiful girl in a white dress but she had her hair dyed so much it was ruined; there was a good-looking man in a beautiful blue sportcoat but he squinted. I don't know why I've gotten that way lately. I look at people and they seem perfectly plausible. Then I see the really awful little thing that ruins them. I looked at Linda

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and I decided her wrong thing wasn't apparent. That pleased me. I get tired of all the wrong things. I'm not looking for them. They just seem to be there, like me being too skinny.

We went home about two o'clock and I guess that was the latest I'd been up in over a year. It felt strange to look up and see the moon going down over the water and feel that late-night, early-morning chill.

They didn't want to go to bed so I made them some scrambled eggs with the little green peppers and they ate that. Then I made them a nightcap out of cream and crème de menthe and a secret ingredient and they drank that. Kramer can get real nasty about some of my drinks sometimes, but Linda seemed to like all of them so he went along with it. He'll do anything to impress other people with his reasonableness. He only yells at me when there's nobody else around.

When we went up to bed I said, "Well, I like that girl."

Kramer said, "Finally, the millennium. I didn't know you liked anybody any more."

"I think I'll ask her to stay over another couple of days."

"I guess she'd like that," Kramer said. "New York isn't very pleasant this time of year."

So she stayed. I wonder if she'd gone on back—but then that's a pretty useless thing now, to wonder.

She and Kramer got everything set up about the lecture tour and she and I talked. I hadn't talked to anybody in a long time—just listened to Kramer—so it was fun. We went dancing again, and this time I just left them with the scrambled eggs and drinks. That's how I found out.

Usually when I go up to bed I go right to sleep, but I guess all the talking I'd been doing lately had stimulated me. I couldn't get to sleep. I lay there in my twin bed and listened to my surf, but it didn't have its usual effect. I kept thinking of things I'd like to say I hadn't got around to yet, so finally I got up and put my robe on. I'd been hearing Kramer talking all the time, but as I started downstairs he shut up and there was just the surf sound—and moonlight. I was barefooted—I never wear bedroom slippers—and I walked out the door without making any noise, I guess. She was actually sitting in his lap, just like the cartoons about secretaries, and he was kissing her neck, and she was making little moaning sounds as though he were some great lover instead of Kramer Lytle, the poor woman's lecture idol. I just stood there and stared at them, because right at first I didn't care whether they knew I was there or not.

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They were getting pretty sloppy about the whole thing by then so I turned around and went back in the house and upstairs. I knew then what her flaw was. She's got this little picture of herself as some sort of abandoned maiden.

I figured there was no point planning right then what I had to do, so I just turned over and went to sleep. I'd known for a long time it was going to come to this with Kramer anyway. There had been moments when I knew I would have to do it if he snapped his fingers or said "Now in my humble opinion" one more time, but I hadn't counted on having to include one of the girls.

I got up next morning and fixed them a really good breakfast. I figured they needed it. The funny thing was that knowing now exactly what I was going to do made me hungry. I hadn't had any appetite in a long time—not since the money. First I'd gotten to where I just didn't like certain things: eggs and meat. Then it got to be fish too, and lately there just wasn't much of anything I really wanted—a little bread, maybe, with my rum and soda. This morning, though, I ate as much as they did, maybe even a little more.

I saw Kramer watching me and I said, "What's the matter?"

"I just wondered why you were eating like that," he said. "I thought you didn't like eggs and bacon any more."

"Oh," I said, "I guess it's because I've got somebody to talk to these days. Conversation just plain makes me as hungry as a shark."

They both laughed. Ha-ha. Funny. I looked at her, all dewy and virginal. I wondered whether it was really Kramer or the money, but the dewy look probably meant it was Love. She was just a natural-born idiot. If I'd thought it was the money I might have spared her, but there wasn't much point in it if she was really in love with Kramer. That didn't give her much of a future anyway. She had only *seemed* bright and clever after all. It was a veneer, like the New York look. Underneath she was just a dumb broad. I'd been wasting my time talking to her all along, just like the years I'd wasted trying to talk to Kramer when all he wanted was a listening post.

It was so simple I didn't have to do much actual planning. The poison was in the house. We kept various kinds for the various insects. It didn't really matter which one I picked. By the time I got through with one of my extra special stingaroos of a drink they weren't going to taste anything in it anyway, and they'd drink it. Linda thought she was being horribly

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clever liking anything I whipped up in the kitchen, and Kramer was going along with it to impress her and lull me. That's another thing about him. He never has known that I'm not stupid. He never had the faintest idea he could ever bore *me*.

They sat around all day looking at the ocean with Simple Simon expressions, and once they actually went into the kitchen and started whispering. I guess they figured I was so crazy about her I wasn't going to notice anything. I let them think it. It didn't make any difference. They'd know by tonight.

About five o'clock I said, "Let's go out to dinner."

That took them both aback.

"Why?" Kramer asked. "You know you love to cook and we love to eat it."

"I don't know," I said. "I just want to. I'll whomp us up a good drink first. I've got a real weirdo of an idea for tonight. Then we'll go out."

They looked at each other and both said, "Fine, fine."

I got dressed early so I'd have time in the kitchen while they were getting dressed. I wanted to do it all up really special, so I wore a new dress Kramer had brought me when he came back from one of his lecture trips—a conscience present. Not because he'd actually been up to anything; he'd never really had the nerve for that. It took this girl with the dewy look really to fool him into thinking he was man enough to *try* anything in the first place.

I went outside and put my best straw placemats on the terrace table. I fixed some zingy hors d'oeuvres and even put a big bouquet of flowers in the middle of the table. Appropriate.

In the kitchen I went to work on the specialty. There were some coconuts I'd been saving and I figured they'd do real well. I cut the tops off and left the milk in and added the gin, the mixers, and the poison. Then I got a really good idea. I never used rum in my specialty drinks. I drank only the best, and it was mine. Kramer didn't have enough palate to taste one drink from another anyway. That was one reason I got such a kick out of mixing up all the mess I could and watching him drink it. I started making the drinks really because I couldn't stand watching him drink cola and vodka or cola and bourbon. He never had known that, but he knew I had a thing about my rum. He didn't really like it anyway, so he thought it was funny, me wanting my six-ninety fifth all to myself. I'd

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heard him telling Linda about it one day and laughing. "Don't touch Miss Iris' rum," he told her. "That is verboten."

So while I was mixing in everything else I thought, Give them a charge, put in some of Miss Iris' six-ninety rum. Why not? It's the last time. I laced it good. Besides, it would cover up anything the least bit odd. I could just hear Kramer saying, "My God, Iris, I taste rum. You really must love us." And I'd say, "Yes, darling. You don't know how much." Even Kramer could taste rum when he hadn't had any in so long.

I stirred it all up and punched holes in the coconut tops and put them back on with a straw through them. Then I hollered, "The sun just went over the yardarm" up the stairs and took the drinks outside. I set the two coconuts square in the middle of two side-by-side placemats. Then I went back and made myself a good stiff rum and soda and brought it out and sat down across the table from where they were going to sit.

They came ambling out, looking like pie, and oohed and aahed over the coconuts.

"You've really outdone yourself tonight, kid," Kramer said. "Sure you won't have one with us?" Then he actually winked at Linda.

"You know I can't quit my good old rum and soda," I said in a good imitation of a submissive voice. "Cheers, dears." I lifted my glass and took a good slug.

They smiled and leaned over and drew through the straws. Then they smiled again, said, "Ummm, good," and took another swig.

I knew they were trying to drink it down fast without having to taste it. I just watched them, drinking my drink, waiting.

Then all of a sudden a simply terrible look came over Linda's face. She went white as a sheet, and she stopped drinking and choked and pushed the coconut back and stared at me. She put a hand out and pushed Kramer's coconut away from him and said, "Oh, my God."

I guessed that mess didn't cover up the taste after all.

Then she said, "Don't, Kramer. Don't drink it. It's got rum in it. It's got rum."

Well, I told you Kramer never thought I had a lot on the ball, but it didn't take me long to figure that one. I knew there wasn't any point in worrying about it either. I'd already drunk half my drink and even Kramer would have had enough sense really to load the bottle, even if Dewey Eyes over there didn't. There wasn't a damned thing I could do about

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it, so I just laughed. I laughed for what seemed like a long time while both of them looked desperate and scared and started to stand up.

"An emetic," Kramer said. "The doctor, the hospital—"

"Sit down, darling," I said. "You've not only got poisoned rum in your drink, but a good measure of Mother Iris' remedy for you in your coconut milk. I don't really think you'll be able to make it."

I looked at the sun. It was almost ready to touch the horizon. When it does, people here make bets on how long it'll take to go under completely. Two minutes is a pretty good estimate. It goes a lot faster than anyone would think.

"I'll give you odds," I said, smiling at them. "I'll last long enough to watch the sun go under and neither of you will make it."

And that's what I'm doing. Sitting here all by myself looking for the last time at that thin little edge of green that comes up just as the sun goes down.

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Our Man in Office 52

by Stewart Pierce Brown

From the first, Sumner Holt knew his plan couldn't fail. What he wasn't prepared for, was how well it would succeed.

He came into the office one morning and found the memo on his desk. He read it standing up, his topcoat half off, his hat on the back of his head. It said simply that the executive board of the Universal Computer Corporation was pleased to announce the promotion of Arnold Bemis to Senior Systems Engineer.

He balled the paper up and threw it savagely at the wastebasket.

Arnie Bemis. That did it. That was the end. The living end.

The company was run by idiots. Idiots and machines. They wouldn't recognize a really good systems man if he came up and sat in their laps.

Grimly he recalled the words of the Chairman of the Board. "UCC is a tomorrow-minded organization, gentlemen," Phillip L. Stokes had told them. "We urge the same philosophy on you individually. Think not of yourselves as today's Systems Engineers. Think of yourselves as tomorrow's *Senior* SE's heading a group. Indeed, look on to the next tomorrow, when a select few of you will rise from Seniors to Systems Engineer *Managers*. Yes, look even to that ultimate tomorrow when one of you will become *Director* of Systems Engineering. That tomorrow is coming, gentlemen. How soon depends on what you do right now. For at UCC, only merit today can mean advancement tomorrow."

Merit today, the man said. So they advance Arnie Bemis.

"Coffee?" Edna's voice tapped at the edge of his bitterness. He shook his head. "Dexamyl? Seconal?" She put his mail on the desk and opened the blinds. "Booze?"

"Funny lady." He waved her away.

She picked the crumpled memo from the floor, holding it gingerly away from her body. "Straight razor?"

He waved again and she went out, dropping the paper into the basket.

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She knew how he felt. They all did. What a kick in the head.

And Billie. Wait'll he tried to explain to *her*. A real fun scene.

He'd spent ten months, two weeks and—he glanced at his desk calendar—four days building character with Miss Wilma Phillips. They had met at a large party in a small apartment, crowded together in a corner of the noisy room. He had been fascinated by her. She was blonde, beautiful, unescorted, and genuinely interested in learning why he had become a Systems Engineer; and he was flattered.

"I'm a compulsive puzzle-solver is why," he had explained. "Have been ever since I was a kid. I like to get answers. That, and the fact that I've always been a math bug—it seemed a natural."

"Do you like those machines? Those computers and electronic brains and things?"

"Doesn't everybody?"

She made a face. "Frankly, they scare me."

"Well, you just need a Systems Engineer in your life, that's all."

"Something tells me you have one in mind."

"My card."

She laughed lightly. "And do you have a system all worked out?"

"Definitely not. With a good SE, every one is custom-made. That's our job. Analyze customer's special requirements. Design individual system to meet them. Recommend proper machines, methods, procedures. Solve problem."

"Thanks. Makes me feel like U.S. Steel."

"Man's creativity, machine's reliability—an unbeatable combination."

"And what machine do you plan to recommend in this case?"

"Well, I have an automobile downstairs—"

It was the beginning of ten and a half months of careful image building. She now regarded him as, if not the inventor of electronics, certainly its most skilled and able practitioner in the field of business machines.

The Bemis bomb would put a few cracks in the image, he knew. But better to tell her the bad news himself than have her pick it up on the grapevine.

He phoned her at the advertising agency where she worked and gave it to her straight. He heard a tiny gasp. "But, Sumner, I thought *you* were—"

"Honey, ability has nothing to do with it. The brass around here don't know what's going on, who's got it and who hasn't."

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"Oh, Sum, they must. They wouldn't be where they are if they didn't."

Dear Billie. Always loyal to The Establishment.

"The place is too big, too impersonal. Phil Stokes, Kearney, Jr.—they don't know one systems man from another. We're just punched cards to them. Time for a promotion? Press a button, a Bemis card comes out, so Bemis gets made a Senior SE."

"But maybe he's been doing things you don't know anything about."

"*That's* for sure."

"I don't mean anything political. Perhaps you're just being bitter."

"Angel, I *know* this creep."

"Yes, but to say the president of the company doesn't know what's going on. And the Chairman of the *Board*—"

Sumner sighed. There was no way she'd ever believe it. Ten months, two weeks, and four days—voom!

It was then that his eye fell on the office across the hall. Office 52. Empty and echoing. As he stared at it, with Billie's voice running on unheard against his left ear, the idea came to him. Complete. As though one of the electronic brains down the hall had spelled it all out on a giant card for him.

He sat up straight in his chair. "Angel, look, I'll prove it to you. I'll *prove* they don't have any idea of who the good men are around here."

"You're talking fast, Sumner. Please don't get all—"

"I mean Stokes, Junior, Bemis—everybody. Including the machines."

"Sumner, are you waving your arms? See, maybe that's why they chose someone else. You get so—so dramatic. They don't like that."

"I'm not one of their machines, honey. But all right, you wait. You'll see for yourself how little they all know about what's going on."

"Sumner? You won't do anything crazy again, will you? Don't you see, they want good, stable men for these responsible positions."

He heard without heeding, his mind racing. When she hung up he walked to the door and stood looking across at Office 52. O.K., idiots. Name the game.

He spent the next hour making out a list of props.

The rest of the morning he devoted to revising a seventeen-page data-processing system to be programmed for Hercules Traprock & Gravel. He demonstrated how the company could increase efficiency in its accounting and record-keeping departments by replacing some of its old business machines, installing two new ones and applying more advanced

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methods of work flow. His writing was precise, accurate, and scientifically correct in every detail, so clear that even a fifth-grader like the head of Hercules Traprock could understand it. He attached a note to the UCC salesman who was to make the presentation: "If you need more dope, give me a ring." A good systems man could do no more.

On his way to lunch, he met Bemis at the elevators.

"Congratulations, Arnie, I just read the announcement."

"Thanks, Sum. *Times* or *Trib*?"

"I mean the office memo."

"Oh. Well, get the *Trib*. Better write-up, better picture, better page position." In the elevator, Bemis sighed heavily. "I don't know, Sum. It's a big job. We've grown so fast lately."

Watching the flickering numbers, Sumner caught the "we". It didn't take long.

"I want to get around and meet the systems men I don't know. It'll take weeks, but it's the only way. SE's are the heart of our business."

I can just see you, Sumner thought, as the 1 lighted up and the doors hissed open. You're just going to sit there in your big new office, keeping your needle-sharp pencils at the prescribed executive length and your prescribed blue suit free of lint while the SE's stay just what they've always been, a file of punched cards.

He said simply, "Have a good lunch, Arnie."

At the corner, waiting for the light, he looked up at the towers of glass and steel shadowing the street. New York, N. Y. Gee, Dad, it's Glamour City!

He remembered his first job, in a gritty downtown office, writing sales literature about Japanese-made electric desk calculators, and getting paid practically in green stamps. Some glamour.

The light changed and he went on downtown. He determined to have a long, be-Gibsoned lunch and to hell with company policy. Take away the taste of the morning.

He returned to the office free of pain and worry. He smiled at the blank door of Office 52 as he passed. At his desk, he sat back, fingers locked behind his head, and waited for five o'clock.

Edna appeared in the doorway. "Been out sticking pins in your Arnold Bemis doll?"

"Oh, it's Miss Jolly-Up again!"

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"You said something about more work on the Hercules revisions after lunch."

"Not after that lunch."

"Ah-zo. Shall I close the door? Mr. Stokes is very strict about not reading plans with your eyes shut."

"Bye."

"I tried to tell him that's often the way you do your best work."

"Bye."

"Bye." She closed the door anyway.

By four o'clock he was restless. He walked the straight, antiseptic halls to the water cooler. He got a drink, exchanged bad jokes about Bemis with Ernie Claypen, and returned to his office.

Ernie was another example. A better systems man than Bemis, times ten. Yet they had him stuck away in a little windowless cubicle, grinding away at the most unexciting problems of their dreariest accounts. Somebody, sometime, had punched some bad holes in Ernie's card. No one was sure why. Maybe he'd once worn a light-colored suit. Maybe he talked too much about dear old Montana State U. Maybe he'd made one joke too many about the salesmen who came running to the SE's when customers started asking them questions. Whatever it was, Ernie was never going to make it big.

An office without a window. If Phil Stokes ever learned how many of his customers became bigger customers because of the systems and programs Ernie Claypen had developed for them, he'd keep the poor little guy entirely under glass.

Five o'clock finally came. He made himself wait until everyone had gone, then he slipped across the hall into 52. He made a note of the telephone extension. He checked the desk for supplies. He sat behind it. Only a section of the corridor and part of his own office were visible. Even the secretarial pool was out of sight. So much the better. He gave the barren little room a final look, then closed the door.

On the way uptown to pick up Billie, traffic slowed his cab to a halt on Third Avenue. He found himself staring out at M. J. Burke's. The place looked smaller and shabbier than he remembered it. Like his grade school when he'd gone back once.

Gaudeamus. And good riddance. It seemed a long time ago.

Burke's, a self-conscious saloon that was a haven for the eternal collegians in the business, was where he first met Arnie Bemis. Bemis had

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just joined Universal Computer Corporation then. One evening as they stood at the long, scarred bar, he mentioned that UC was looking for another junior systems man. Sumner, desperate to get out of the tiny company downtown, phoned them the next day. He was interviewed by a senior SE named Hersholt Benson and hired a week later.

And so began the Seven Years War. He had found Arnold Bemis, career electronics man, a vastly different person from the carefree table-hopper he had first met at Burke's.

Sumner was glad when the cab moved forward and the place was out of sight.

At dinner, Billie was full of curiosity about his plan, but he told her nothing.

"You're being a perfect beast," she said finally, giving up.

"Sumner Holt, Boy Beast."

"Just *please* don't do anything silly while I'm away."

"How long will you be gone?"

"You know very well—two weeks. Sum, please."

"I think I can go two weeks without doing anything silly."

Their tone was light but he could see she was truly uneasy, and obviously disappointed. He was going to have to scramble.

They went to a movie and he took her home early. Man of steel, he told himself, watching the lithe and lovely figure cross the apartment lobby, the long, taffy-colored hair bouncing softly with each stride.

Back in his own apartment, he assembled his props. Last to go into the box was a man's grey felt hat with the initials WTM in the band. It had been left by an unknown, uninvited guest on New Year's Eve. He dusted it off, set his alarm an hour earlier, and lulled himself to sleep thinking of names to match the three initials.

The next morning at UCC, Office 52's lights were on and a faint odor of cigarette smoke tinged the air. A hat and coat hung on the wall hook. There was a sheet of paper in the typewriter. Supplies, including a slide rule, were in the desk. On top of it, a new blotter had been fitted into the four plastic corners. A chipped ceramic beer stein held a platoon of freshly sharpened pencils. Next to a folded copy of the morning *Times* was a booklet entitled *Welcome to UCC* open to page 9 (Sec. A: Time Off & Vacations). Alongside it was a container of coffee and a packet of sugar.

The regulation card on the door said Walter T. Morrell.

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By 10 o'clock several people had passed by. Few looked in. None stopped.

Then at 10:30, Henry Felder came into Sumner's office. "See you've got a new neighbor," he said, dropping a photostat of Sumner's time sheet on the desk.

Leave it to Henry. Mother Hen Felder.

Sumner studied the sheet. "What, somebody doubt I worked 'til eleven Monday night?"

"No. But you didn't deduct forty-five minutes for dinner." Felder was the Assistant Section Comptroller. A precise, buttoned-up man, he regarded SE's as a wildly disorganized lot who long ago would have plunged the company into bankruptcy were it not for his unceasing vigilance. "You should only claim four hours, six minutes."

He's getting to look more like the machines every day, Sumner thought. He even walks as though he had a key in his back. "It so happens I didn't have any dinner. I worked through."

"It should be indicated in Column 4." Felder's voice was impatient. "Where's he from?"

Sumner shrugged. "Got me." There was only one quicker way to start information through UC than to tell it to Henry Felder: that was to try to keep it from him. "Somebody said he'd been in London for the last couple of years."

He could hear Felder's inner keys punching out *IBM*.

"Kearney, Jr., I think. He knew him from somewhere before."

A slotted card marked *Ivy League* fed into Felder's mental file.

"Supposed to be a red-hot code man."

Felder blinked and an *XK700* card dropped into place. It was their newest machine, a single-unit electronic accounting system designed for small businesses.

When the comptroller left, Sumner checked his watch: 10:43.

Just before lunch he ran into Irv Thomas in the men's room. "Hi, Irv."

"Sum. Busy?"

"Wild. This place is getting to be a madhouse."

"At least they're hiring more people. This new guy, Morrell—"

"Oh, yeah, across from me. I hear he's slightly sensational."

Thomas nodded wisely. "Junior snatched him from IBM. They were Yale buddies. He's going to be working on the new XK700."

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Sumner glanced at his watch again. 12:28. Felder was right on the stick.

That afternoon, just before five, he slipped across the hall again. He was gone only a few minutes. When he came out, he left the door open.

The homeward lemmings streaming down the hall saw that the *Times* had been tossed in the wastebasket and the ashtray was full of cigarette butts. Typewritten pages, acrawl with pencilled corrections, were strewn across the desk. On the wall was pinned a multi-colored diagram of the XK700's electronic memory file beneath a picture postcard of the Alps. The ceiling light still burned but the desk lamp was out. The hat and coat were no longer on the hook. Walter Morrell had gone home.

It had been a good day's work, Sumner decided, surveying the scene. Out in the street he felt wildly elated. He had great plans for old Walt in the next two weeks.

He strolled uptown in the crisp fall evening. A pale lavender sky hung at the western end of the streets. He could see the Palisades clearly and caught occasional glimpses of the pewter river. In the upper Fifties he turned in at one of his favorite restaurants. The owner greeted him warmly as he found a place at the bar.

At the sound of his name a man seated down the bar looked up sharply. It was Hersholt Benson, sitting with a pretty girl. He lifted his glass in Sumner's direction.

"To your new Senior SE."

Sumner shrugged. "You said it first."

Benson downed half his drink and turned back to his companion.

Sumner took a sip, then set his glass down on the polished wood in front of him, staring down into it. Absently, he shredded the beads of moisture down its sides with his thumb and forefinger.

Poor Hersh. Bemis had murdered him. It had been an education to watch. Bemis didn't have much stuff, but Benson had swung at everything. Within six months, UCC dumped him.

Sumner finished his drink and managed to get into the dining room without having to stop and talk with Benson. After dinner he went back to his apartment and put together his first material on the XK700.

Next morning he sent it around to Neil Torrin, head of the Sales Group handling the new machine. He planted a new container of coffee in Office 52, hung up the hat and coat, and sent Walter Morrell off on another day.

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Neil Torrin was one of the principal reasons he had chosen the XK700 as Walter's baby. Torrin was one of the few Sales Group heads who left the SE's alone. He seldom appeared on the eleventh floor. He rarely phoned. He loathed meetings. He was a memo man.

There was one from him in Walter Morrell's desk the following afternoon:

> XK stuff for Consolidated is O.K. Could use slightly more detail on Selective Character Set Feature. Otherwise great. Welcome aboard.
>
> Neil T.

Sumner grinned. He tucked the memo away in a brown envelope in his desk drawer.

In the days that followed, Universal Computer Corporation quietly absorbed Walter T. Morrell into the corporate family. Twenty minutes of flirtatious banter with Miss Bonnie Lenz on the fifth floor had procured for Sumner a supply of unpunched cards. Personnel received one and duly processed it. So did Payroll. Morrell, Walter T., Off. 52, appeared on routing lists and in the office phone directory. Traffic and Systems Control entered him as the accredited replacement for the SE, now on sick leave, originally assigned to the XK700. He received mail, answered it, prepared additional material for the new machine. Two more postcards arrived from his friends in Europe, and on his desk appeared a leather-framed photo of an attractive woman in her mid-twenties holding a small boy on her lap.

Morrell's incoming phone calls were handled by the secretaries in the pool, who left messages on his desk. His callers seemed unperturbed when he didn't call back. Once or twice, when it was urgent, Sumner did return the calls, deepening his voice and masking the phone with his handkerchief. For Morrell's infrequent visitors he developed several variations on the temporary-absence theme. "He just left. I don't know where he went." "He was here a minute ago—any message?" "Did you try the Math Section?" "Is his coat there? He may be out of the office today." He was careful not to use the same line twice on any one caller.

He found he enjoyed organizing and writing Morrell's XK700 material for Consolidated Manufacturing. It was a release. He let himself go as he couldn't on his own assignments. He humanized the language, added

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warmth and color. For Consolidated, he mounted the kind of presentation he had always wanted to prepare, the very best.

The contented memos from Torrin continued. His salesmen reported Consolidated loved Morrell's work. The brown envelope grew fat. Then one day recognition came from Phillip Llewellyn Stokes himself. It was scrawled across the rough draft of the XK700 Operating Manual and addressed to Torrin, who had forwarded it to Morrell:

> Neil—In my humble opinion, this is the most lucid technical writing we've had since our original Mark IV treatise. Congratulate WTM, whoever he may be, UCC needs more like him.
>
> P.L.S.

Sumner wanted to laugh aloud. Stokes himself had done the Mark IV work in the company's early days. Beyond this you couldn't go.

Into the brown envelope.

It was that same afternoon that Bemis came to Office 52 for the first time. He peered in uncertainly.

"Help you, Arnie?" Sumner asked from across the hall.

Bemis started. "Uh? Oh, hi, Sum. Seen—ah, Morrell?"

"I think he went for coffee. Be right back. Smoke?"

"Damn it," Bemis sighed, taking the cigarette.

"Well, you wanted to be a Senior SE."

"Oh, it's not just that—"

"Morrell? How's he doing, anyway?"

"Just great. So I hear."

"What do you mean, you hear?"

"This is one of those things Junior's always doing. He must have hired this genius when I was on vacation. He never tells me. I haven't even set eyes on the guy."

"Walt Morrell?"

"Wouldn't know him if I fell over him. I mean, I've been busy and the way this place is growing—" He glanced impatiently at the empty office. "Look, he could be another hour. I'll leave him a note."

As soon as Bemis had gone, Sumner slipped into Office 52 and picked up the envelope he had left.

This was it. This was all he needed. The Senior Systems Engineer, the Sales Group head, and the Chairman of the Board. It would make a nice collection to spread before Miss Phillips tomorrow. The time had come, he decided almost reluctantly, for Walter T. Morrell to retire.

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Across the hall, his buzzer sounded. Cramming the envelope into his pocket, he hurried to the phone. "Yes?"

"Junior wants to see you," Edna said.

"Mr. Kearney?"

"Name dropper."

"What about?"

"He didn't bother with an agenda. Just said to be in his office at 2:30."

Sumner looked at his watch. "Ten minutes. O.K. I'll have a coke first."

"He'll smell it on your breath."

"You can be replaced by a machine, Miss XK."

She had just brought the coke when Felder came in. He pushed the time sheet across the desk again. "Look, fella, don't you ever eat?"

"Now what? You mean this one here—Tuesday? I had lunch in."

"Column 4, Column 4," Felder reminded him.

Sumner drained the cup and dropped it into the wastebasket. Felder followed him as he rose and headed for the door. "What's your rush?"

"Summit conference," Sumner said. He stopped in the doorway, smiling to himself. The time sheet was a cover. Felder had his rumor nets out, dragging the halls. O.K., Mother Hen, haul this one in.

"What's all this about Morrell, Henry?"

Felder's thin sharp nose twitched. "All what?"

"I hear he's leaving."

"Leaving? Already? Where'd you get that?"

"I don't know, a couple of places."

"Nothing to it," Felder said, pushing past him into the hall. He could hardly wait to check it out.

"Well, I figured you'd know, Henry."

The blue suit was well down the hall. Sumner laughed. Monday would be the day, when the Mother Hen saw that empty office.

He found Kearney, Jr. in his shirtsleeves, studying a wiring diagram spread over his desk. Mr. Wizard, with the $20.00 suspenders and the 10¢ talent.

"Oh, hello there, Holt. Sit down, won't you?" Kearney slipped on his coat and sat behind the desk. "Let me get right to the point, which I'm sure you'll appreciate. Briefly, Holt, we're letting you go."

"Letting—you mean firing me?"

"You know how it is. UCC is growing fast. Too fast, actually. We've picked up a lot of fat that needs trimming. Now, your work isn't *bad.*

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Many another outfit would be proud to have it, I'm sure. But we've got all these bright youngsters pushing up from below. Their stuff is brilliant. One like that on Consolidated's XK700 right now. Next to his, I'm afraid your work looks a little pale, Holt." He spread his hands and smiled frostily. "So there you are. In lieu of more notice, we'll arrange for a month's pay—"

Sumner found himself sitting very erect. There was a wild rushing in his ears. He heard a faraway voice that sounded vaguely like his own saying, "Mr. Kearney, there's something I think you should know."

The intercom buzzed. Kearney pressed the key and his secretary's voice came through metallically. "Your call to Rome is ready, Mr. Kearney. On seven."

"Sorry, Holt—if you'll excuse me?"

Sumner rose. "Well, sir, I would like to say—" But Kearney's voice was already booming into the phone.

Out in the hall, Sumner steadied himself against the wall. He made his way numbly back to his office. If he didn't explain, he was out. If he did, he was out without the month's pay. UCC didn't go for jokes, practical or otherwise.

He closed his door and stood staring out the window. He tried to picture the upcoming scene with Billie but his imagination curdled. Maybe if he got right on the phone and lined up another job before she got back tomorrow—

He heard footsteps running in the hall outside. They stopped at 52. Then his own door flew open. Bemis burst in, flushed and anxious. "Do you know where Morrell is? I've been looking for him for an hour!"

"Sorry, sir, this isn't my table."

"He's *never* in his office. Do you have any idea—?"

"Arnie. I don't work here any more."

"I know, Sum, I know. And I'm sorry. There just wasn't anything I could do. You know how it is. Look, I've got to find Morrell—"

"Let me tell you something—"

"I haven't got time, Sum, I have—"

"About Morrell."

"Morrell? What about him? Tell me."

Sumner told him.

The color left Bemis' face. When it returned it was a deep, dark purple. His voice sounded strangled. "No such person exists then, is that right?"

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"That's right."

Bemis looked like a man about to throw himself on a live grenade. "Sumner, you know who's here right now? Averill Chapman."

"Chapman? From Consolidated?"

"*From* Consolidated? He *is* Consolidated. Junior and Stokes are giving him the sixty-cent tour right now. They're due on this floor in thirty-one minutes, at Morrell's office at 4:04."

"*Morrell's* office?"

"Right. Chapman wants to meet him. Remember, Consolidated turned us down on the XK700 at first? O.K., but now Chapman has flipped over the material he's been getting from this new systems man and he's ready to install all the hardware we can sell him. Only he insists on meeting this genius first." He looked at his watch and groaned. "Sum, listen—you've got to help us out. We'll look like *idiots*. Will you do this—will you just go across the hall and make like Walter Morrell?"

"*You're* asking me—you want *me* to be Morrell?"

"You *are*, aren't you? Or he *is*—oh, the hell with it. Look, it's just for a few minutes. Just while Chapman's here. Sum, please—for old times' sake."

Sumner stood silently staring at him for a long moment. Then he smiled what he hoped looked like a resigned smile. "Well, O.K., Arnie," he said, trying to keep the growing excitement out of his voice. "For old times' sake."

"Great, Sum, thanks!" Bemis gripped his hand hard. "4:04," he said, and was gone.

Sumner was in Office 52 at 4:02. He heard Kearney's voice leading the inspection party. "Mr. Chapman, I know how anxious you are to meet—"

Junior stopped dead in the doorway. Stokes, Bemis, and a tall white-haired man piled up behind him. The name Walter Morrell never passed his lips.

The occupant of Office 52 had his feet on the desk so that his dirty white sneakers were painfully obvious. He wore no necktie. Dark glasses covered his eyes and a long cigar stuck straight out from between his teeth. The air was blue with its smoke. A half-empty bottle of gin was on the desk and, next to it, a large paper cup with two straws. Papers littered the floor.

"Don't you clowns ever knock?" he asked hoarsely.

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Shock propelled Bemis forward. "This is Mr. Chapman—eh, Walter. Mr. Chapman, Walter Morrell."

"Chappy!" Sumner bounded from his chair. He pumped Chapman's arm like a jack-handle. "Daddy-O, am I glad to see *you!*"

"Thank you, Mr. Morrell, it's a pleasure—"

"Because I been working on some of your other problems, baby, and have I got *answers!* How'd you like to dump half those old broads in your bookkeeping department?"

"Sir, each of those young ladies—"

"Sure, I know, was hired by you personally. I pegged you for a real swinger the minute you walked in, pal. But think of the payroll savings! You can—hey, you want a drink? Any of you other cats? Well, I'll just freshen this one—"

Pouring, he watched them from behind the dark glasses. Stokes he figured about eleven seconds from a coronary. Kearney was mentally deducting Consolidated's fees from future income. Bemis was about to smother another grenade.

"Y'see, Chappy sweetheart, you're operating like it was A.D. 4. Like you were going to come on here in a green eyeshade and celluloid cuffs. Now, what that buggy-whip factory of yours *really* needs—"

When Bemis returned alone, Sumner was back in his own office. The scene had lasted more than thirty minutes before they were able to get Chapman out. It was after five now and he was cleaning out his desk. Bemis dropped heavily into a chair. His eyes were still glazed.

"Sumner," he began in the flat lifeless tones of a man who has seen everything and most of it in the last hour, "Sumner, put that junk back in your desk. You're not leaving. As of ten minutes ago Stokesie appointed you a Senior SE."

"Appointed—what is this, a gag?"

Wearily Bemis shook his head. "In a word, chum, Chapman loved you. He claimed he was tired of all these automation types who dressed the same and looked the same and talked the same. He was tired of blue-suit goose-steppers who thought like machines and talked like textbooks. He was looking for somebody with a little color, a little pizazz. Well, brother, he found him. He's not only going for the XK700, he wants our whole computer series *and* the electronic time-cost system. In both his plants."

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Sumner felt the rushing in his ears again. "*Chapman?* But I did everything I could to make him think—"

Bemis fixed him with a cynical eye. "We know what you tried to do, friend. Only it boomeranged. He loves you. Stokes had to promise him you'd head up his whole operation."

I'll order champagne, Sumner told himself above the rushing sound. I'll get theater tickets. I'll hire a limousine to pick her up.

"But wait a minute. You mean everytime he comes in, I have to take charge of—?"

"He only makes it twice a year. So once every six months you do your little dance, and the rest of the year you count your money. A tough life."

Billie was expecting the worst, he could tell. She was frowning worriedly as they came out of the apartment building. She turned west out of habit. Sumner guided her to the car at the curb. The uniformed chauffeur held the door. It chunked solidly behind them. Sumner sank back into the luxurious leather.

Billie stared at him in disbelief. "Sumner, what on earth—?"

He drew her back gently. Carefully he flicked a thread from his lapel. "I had a long talk with Stokes while you were gone, dear," he began as the long black car slid serenely out into the stream of traffic.

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Wonderful, Wonderful Violence

by Donald Honig

What made it all so ludicrous was the fact that Angus Monroe was the most unlikely person in the bank to be caught up in so harrowing and dramatic a situation. He was the most ordinary and inconspicuous sort of person imaginable—just above fifty, short, portly, grey, immaculate, wordless. He was a shy bachelor without friends who lived in two rooms on the other side of town.

But beneath that veneer of reticence and anonymity there beat a sullen and resentful heart. Angus had the feeling that the world had cruelly passed him by, that he had never participated. There were, as a consequence, no grand and gaudy memories to sustain his loneliness.

He appeared at the bank's front door with predictable punctilio at five to nine every morning, materializing there like a ghost, neat, indisputable, inevitable, his hat balanced on his small head, his small eyes staring blinkless and persistent behind their silver-rimmed lenses. The assistant manager opened the door and greeted him with a curt nod to which Angus responded with just as curt a nod and a brisk "Good morning," and in his heart chanting with bitterness the same refrain, You pompous owl. He marched with short steps past the other employees, each of whom rendered him an assembly-line nod of greeting, to the employees' room where he hung away his hat and coat and poked his arms into his tan-colored working jacket, buttoned it primly, and went out and took his place as teller behind the third window just as the nine o'clock bell rang and with great pomp and dignity the assistant manager swept the doors back with a grand and benign baring of white teeth whether customers were there or not. You'd think the King of England himself was coming through, Angus thought darkly to himself.

The routine never varied. At the next window stood Mr. Carlisle, tall, good-looking, unctuous, with a smooth and clever word for every attractive feminine patron. All of that grated intolerably on Angus' nerves as

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he stood and listened to Carlisle say all the things he himself would like to say. It all made him clench his thin lips until they turned white.

And then one morning, a little before ten o'clock, the routine varied, violently. Angus had just left the cage to get a cup of water and was walking across the floor when two men moved through the door, letting the doors swing back behind them. They strode imperiously, their faces set, their long, taut-belted trenchcoats flapping tersely with each step. Angus stared at them curiously, feeling an odd intuitive snap inside of himself, finding himself wishing these men really were what he felt them to be. Their mere entrance seemed to generate something in the staid and placid air, a stirring, an uneasiness. They would do something, Angus hoped. They would hold up the tellers, throw bombs, fire bullets through the nerveless infuriating clock; they would do something.

And they did.

One of the men, the taller, slid his hand into his coat and snapped out a gun. There was instant pandemonium even before he uttered a word. A woman teller screamed. The assistant manager sprung up at his desk—and in the face of a mighty .45 automatic sat right down. The tall man was snapping orders, moving along the windows, his gun prominently in the faces of everyone. The smaller man was taking charge of the several patrons, herding them together against a wall which was obscured from outside eyes. The tall man, his fedora pulled forward almost covering his eyes, was collecting money in a large canvas bag. It was all happening swiftly, uncannily, almost dreamlike, the excitement poised and bristling in the startled air.

"You too!" Suddenly Angus heard the words directed at him, realized that this was the second time the small man had spoken to him. The portly teller was standing alone in the middle of the floor watching everything like a spectator, reserving all judgment. He realized everyone was looking at him as if expecting him to take some action.

The small man came menacingly toward him, holding his .45 automatic low, the black barrel glaring up at Angus.

"Get over there!" the small man ordered.

"I—heard you," Angus said, but still unable to move, rooted to the spot, not afraid but fascinated, almost like a child, watching it all with that blank speechless fascination of the child.

"Come on!" the tall man called. He was moving away from the tellers'

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cages, holding the large canvas bag, the top of which slacked over but which still showed considerable content. "Take him," the tall man said.

The small man shot a quizzical glance over his shoulder, then, turning back to Angus, drove the .45 up into his soft yielding stomach, making Angus gasp.

"Move out, Maxie," the small man said to Angus. "Slow and careful." He moved around behind Angus.

The tall man was at the door, addressing the line of frozen-faced people.

"Anybody says anything before fifteen minutes—" and he indicated the approaching Angus "—and he gets flowers and regrets." Then, with a bold and confident gesture, he swung open the doors and went out, followed by a hesitant, doubtful Angus and the small man whose eyes, as cold and as rigid as steel, swept meaningfully over the people.

There was a car parked up the block. As they approached it Angus could hear the motor trembling under the hood.

The tall man appeared casual, but his words and his gestures were brisk, cold, calculated.

"Shove the guy in front with us," he said, talking, moving, all in one smooth practiced breath, open the door, the canvas bag disappearing into the back.

"All right, Maxie," the small man said, pushing Angus with his body. Angus slid across the front seat's cold smooth plastic seatcover. In a moment the two men were around him and the car had started.

Angus, still not fully emerged from his dream, from the shock of imagination ceasing and reality beginning, stared straight ahead through the wide curve of windshield, feeling an importance, a significance that he had never known before, a tingling of great excitement. Suddenly before his inward eye flashed the scene that must be occurring back at the bank. He saw them all darting around like people hurled and juggled, babbling and exclaiming and telling each other what had happened and what they thought and how awful it had been. And preeminent above it all would be his name, their concern for him, Angus Monroe, who had been abducted by thieves, thrust into the hands of potential killers, whose life was suddenly a heroic and dreadful thing. If only they could see how calm and composed he was, how easily he was facing it.

He began to sidle glances at the men. The tall man, guiding the wheel, sat aloof, his profile slightly raised, watching the road with a disinterest and impatience as though he had covered it a thousand uneventful times

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in his life and would a thousand times more. The other sat in a slouch, his arms crossed, a wryly pleased expression on his face. Angus could fairly feel him whirling the money about in his warped and corrupted brain.

But soon the captive began to feel a slight trickling of fear and apprehension. He felt it quavering in his knees, wallowing in his stomach. The excitement had worn away, the glory beginning to become dubious. But he endeavored to suppress the fear, to resist it, master it. He cleared his throat. This seemed to arouse the small man.

"Y'know, Maxie's all right," the small man said, shifting about in his seat.

The tall man said nothing.

"No fuss, no yelling," the small man said.

"Nobody argues with a revolver," Angus said dryly, and was immediately pleased with himself. He thought it a singularly apt and clever statement. (Certainly, the obnoxious Carlisle would never have had the composure and alertness of mind in this situation to say such a thing.)

"Maxie," the small man said genially, grinning with small, rotted teeth that only half showed, "you're acquainted with a basic law of survival."

"My name is not Maxie," Angus said, still in that dry, almost bored tone. "My name is—" and he could not say Angus. That was suddenly a most ridiculous and unfortunate and unmanly name, hardly a name to invoke respect. "—Floyd," he said, making a spontaneous choice, pleased with it.

"Maxie," the small man retorted promptly. "Your name is Maxie. Isn't that right, Champ?" he asked the tall man.

"His name is Blank for all I care," Champ said.

"His name will be Blank if he doesn't behave himself," the small man said.

"I know which side my bread is buttered on," Angus said, tossing it off with a casualness that astonished him.

"He'll behave," Champ said.

"You know why we call him Champ?" the small man asked. "That's because that's what he is. He's the champ of them all. Right, Champ?"

The tall man grinned tersely, his eyes still watching the road as if he expected it to break into pieces. "You could say that," he said.

They were outside of town now, speeding past neat little cottages, past great fields of barley, past the high school, heading out toward the country.

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The grass was very green, the trees rich in leaves and scent. The small man rolled down the window and the warm breeze poured into the car.

Angus was desperately anxious to ask where they were going but he knew such a question would be curtly repulsed. He was grimly determined not to behave like a "victim" so he sat as stolid and as noncommittal as if he were a legitimate part of the whole thing.

"You got a family, Maxie?" the small man asked, apropos of nothing.

"No," Angus said.

"That's good," the small man said.

It made the fear begin to tremble again. It sped the realities skidding into Angus' mind. He was utterly helpless here between these two men. He knew their faces now, even the name of one of them. He knew their car, the direction they had taken. They were being too casual with him, as if they could trust him never to speak of what had happened. It made him wish he had never come to work this morning, or that he had not stopped and stood so fearless and prominent in the middle of the floor for them to take him out. What was he going to gain from being a hero?

"I'm a man with a weak heart," he suddenly said, improvising.

"Hear that, Champ?" the small man said, leaning over to talk to the tall man. "Maxie's got a bad clock. Don't scare him."

"Wouldn't think of it," Champ said.

Soon they were deep in the country. They drove for miles without passing a house or a person or even another car. The tar road was dark with languorous shadows that kept clipping and bounding over the hood and fleeing up the windshield.

If Angus had been hoping for them to be stopped by state troopers or to encounter a road block somewhere, that hope was soon dissipated. They turned off the main road into a narrow dirt road, the car grinding over the rocks and ruts, a vague cloud of dust lifting around it, floating behind in the windless air. They slashed through some brush and then came to a halt before a small, lifeless cabin. The halt, the sudden silence, was a relief.

The two men slid out of the car. The small man waited for Angus. The gun had reappeared, steady and menacing below the tight-smiling face. The tall man had reached in and hauled out the bag of money. They followed him into the cabin.

There was nothing inside except a table and several chairs. A small low cot stood against a wall. There was one window, the shade pulled down

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before it, muffling the sunlight that fell dimly to the floor. Their feet clumped on the pine-board floor.

Champ swung the bag onto the table.

"Get the rope," he said, his voice quiet, sharp, as if talking to no one in particular but knowing that someone would be there to hear, and obey.

They're going to hang me, Angus thought feverishly. Wild schemes filled him with furious desperation. His eyes glared.

The small man went out and in a moment returned with a length of rope. He was whistling.

"Tie him up," Champ said, his voice still sharp and confident, his eyes hard upon the bag of money.

With relief, Angus gave himself to be bound. The small man sat him down in one of the chairs and with maddening efficiency tied him to it, binding his hands behind with the heavy scratchy rope. Angus sat there, as helpless and forlorn as a child. He watched the two men hold the bag upside down and the money empty onto the table. Champ was looking at him, smiling across the table at him.

"How much do you reckon it is?" Champ asked.

With his practiced eye, Angus regarded the money, his underlip pushing out.

"Ten thousand," he said after a moment.

"Maxie should know," the small man said.

"We'll see," Champ said. Slowly, tediously, he began to count the money, thumbing the edges of the packets, sliding the loose bills from hand to hand.

"Eleven thousand five," he said, finally.

There was a moment of reverence.

"Maxie was close," the small man said.

"What are you going to do to me?" Angus, unable to hold back any longer, blurted out.

"Let it be a surprise," Champ said.

"Yeah," the small man said. "Do you like surprises, Maxie?"

"Only pleasant ones," Angus said dimly.

His captors sat down then and lit cigarettes. They smoked quietly, placidly. For a while they seemed oblivious of Angus' presence. They seemed to be inhaling their wealth, accustoming themselves to it. They were quite at their ease.

Angus began to feel the indignity of himself sitting there bound and

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helpless, as miserable as a creature in a cage. He stared at them, his mounting indignation—as well as their oblivious serenity—making him want to shout at them. And then his thoughts began to drift back to the bank again, to all the furor and excitement that must have occurred there, most of which would have subsided by now. Everyone would be expressing concern for Mr. Monroe.

He imagined them envisioning his plight, shaking their heads, talking about what a fine old person he was. He wanted to snarl at them. He thought then, inexplicably, of the application form he had filled out twenty years ago when he had first applied for a job at the bank, of the line which read, "In case of emergency notify" and of the blank space he had left below it. Poor Mr. Monroe. That would go around the bank too. He would be a lonely heroic figure. Life would be changed for a while when he got back, when he took his place behind the teller's window again. He would be a more formidable person then, but only for a little while, gradually fading back into obscurity—if he got back.

They stuffed the money into the bag and took it out with them. He heard them putting it in the car. Then Champ came back and lay down on the cot that was behind Angus. Soon he was sleeping. The small man lounged in the doorway. He had shed his trenchcoat. His .45 bulged in his belt.

"What are you going to do?" Angus asked quietly.

"Nothing much, Maxie," the small man said. He was smoking, staring into the forest, the smoke weaving lazily on the dry windless air, rolling off into the forest.

"Are you going to leave me here?"

"Maybe. When it gets dark we're taking off."

"They'll be looking for your car."

"But not around here. They'll have us pegged as being a long way out by tonight."

"Clever," Angus said.

"We sure do hope so, Maxie," the small man said, flicking his cigarette into the air, expelling a final stream of smoke into the sunlight, sighing.

It was beginning to grow dark. The two holdup men were sitting outside in the car. Angus could hear the murmur of their voices. They had been sitting out there for almost two hours, ever since Champ had risen from his sleep. And all that while Angus had been wriggling and straining his

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hands, gradually loosening his bonds. It excited him greatly when he realized that his hands were almost free, that with a few more jerks and twists they would be free. What would happen then he didn't know. He gazed hopefully at the window, but it was right next to the car; it would hardly be the place from which to escape. There was a brief vision of himself leaping upon and subduing the two men, and an even more glorious one of him dragging them in by their collars, the bag of money tucked under his arm. They'd give me five dollars and an afternoon off for that, he thought.

The two men appeared in the doorway. They were staring at him. He knew now that they had been discussing his fate.

"We could leave him here," the small man said.

"They wouldn't find him for months," Champ said, his eyes regarding Angus thoughtfully, as if measuring him for an ordeal.

"It wouldn't really be murder either."

Angus stared back at the tall man, trying to read his eyes, which were small and inscrutable below the dark line of his hat brim.

"We'll decide when I get back," Champ said. "You watch him."

The tall man buttoned and belted his trenchcoat as carefully as if it was a uniform and left the cabin. They heard his feet scuffling softly, the sounds becoming more and more distant, then inaudible.

"Where's he going?" Angus asked.

"Just down the road to have a look," the small man said. He wandered about the cabin. He was still coatless, the gun still thrust into his belt.

Angus began to whirl desperate ideas through his mind. He was perspiring freely. If they left him there he would be all right; he would be able to get up and walk away after they left. But—he had seen the thought in Champ's eyes—he knew them, could identify them. Would they take the risk of leaving him when he could possibly extricate himself and incriminate them?

The small man stepped out of the cabin and went to the car. Instantly, purely on impulse, Angus shook the loosened bonds around his wrists to the floor and tried to leap up, his heart hammering, his body hot, wet, but the chair to which he was still tied hobbled him. He swung his arms, and by trying with all his strength to lurch free of the chair he toppled it over. Rickety to begin with, his weight plus the force of the fall wrenched the chair apart and he was soon up on his feet, freeing himself of the rope and the chair's fragments. His sudden freedom was almost unendurable,

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it called for swift and desperate action, action he was too terrified even to contemplate.

He heard the slam of a car door. He picked up a chair and pressed himself against the wall next to the door, lifting the chair higher and higher. He saw the small man's shadow roll across the threshold, and then his body, his face—his face startled for the instant and then furious as Angus hurled down the chair, giving him a vicious and intricate smash with it, crumbling him, the small man trying to catch himself in the doorway but missing, collapsing, and the thought burning like static fire in Angus' mind that the small man was merely dazed, not unconscious, and so Angus reached down for the gun, jerking it free as the small man began to turn in protest. Angus drew back, holding the gun on him.

And the small man gave him no choice. In the face of the loaded, weighty gun he began to rise, his bruised and snarling face brooking no fears, no threats. Angus fired, once. He was amazed that the gun worked, amazed at the roar, at the commotion it caused in his hand, almost causing him to drop it. And amazed as the small man, halfway to his feet, was hurled back against the doorway, his white shirt suddenly flowing with blood as he rolled over and flung a ghastly sightless face up to the pale moon that had risen over the trees.

Angus began to tremble. He jumped over the body and ran out into the woods. He almost expected the grotesque moon-cast forest to lunge and thrust at him, but it held back, still, attentive, the stars gathered round the peeping moon like dazzled eyes.

He suddenly became aware of the fast sounds down the road, the sounds of running feet rapping the dark road. He crouched behind the car, holding the immense gun in both hands now, training it on the spot in the dark from where Champ would emerge.

The running became louder, more urgent. A figure began to loom, floating out of the dark. The tall man came across the grass.

"Lou!" he shouted, seeing the small man's stretched and lifeless body in front of the door.

Angus stood up, holding the gun in both hands, not more than five feet from the moving figure that was now cautiously drawing a gun. Angus fired. Champ was sprawled across the ground. It seemed that he hadn't even fallen, that merely the roar, the smoke had driven him there. Angus peered down, his eyes wide, speculative.

A great hush descended. The forest crooned softly, interminably . . .

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Angus Monroe sat in the police station, neat, shy, pale.

The chief of police was nodding. "You have our deepest sympathy, Mr. Monroe," he was saying. "It must have been a nightmare."

Angus nodded.

"You're lucky you're alive," the bank president said.

"You say you have no idea where they went?" the chief asked.

"No," Angus said, proceeding to repeat his story. "They knocked me out in the car and the next thing I knew I woke up in the bushes. I do know that they were going to meet someone else, in a cabin somewhere in the woods I believe they said, and, from what I gathered, someone they didn't trust very much. From the way they spoke they were anticipating trouble."

"Thieves always fall out," the bank president said righteously.

Angus nodded. But his mind was thinking ahead. Everyone would understand when he resigned his position. The ordeal had been too great. He would go away, far away. He would have everyone's compassion, as well as eleven thousand five.

Classified Continued

(Continued from page 352)

PERSONAL—Cont'd

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Find Artie Smerz—Dead or Alive

by Irwin Porges

When the staccato explosions awakened the inhabitants of Rivertown in the early hours of the morning, everybody knew at once what had happened. There was trouble at the chemical factory. Crowds gathered to watch in awe as huge glowing flames lit the sky. The citizens of this small suburban town, cordoned off by the firemen, were restrained and law-abiding, except for one person—Artie Smerz.

A neighbor, Peter Loret, later recalled how he had observed the strange conduct and had gaped in disbelief. He had seen Artie, whose actions during the past months had astonished his friends, slip under the ropes in an attempt to get closer to the fire. Artie was shunted back by an indignant fireman. Some minutes passed, and Loret turned to glimpse Artie again slipping under the ropes. This time he was unnoticed by the fireman. The light flickered brilliantly for a moment and Loret could detect Artie standing there, as though in hesitation, then he seemed to vanish in the shadows.

That evening, Shirlee Loret, who had discussed the situation with her husband, was the first visitor to call on Celia Smerz. Feeling that some expression of sympathy was expected, Shirlee fumbled for the appropriate words. In the odd circumstances she could find nothing that would apply. "I'm sorry," she murmured. "It's dreadful—" Celia's composure, the cheerful or even amused look on her face, left Shirlee floundering. Condolences seemed positively ludicrous.

"Stop it," said Celia. "You're not talking to a bereaved widow."

The confidence in her voice made Shirlee stare and sputter. "How—how can you be sure? After all, Artie hasn't come home. And Peter saw him, you know, just walking into the fire."

Celia laughed. "Walking into a fire? Artie? Nonsense! It was just an act. Walking on by is more like it."

"You're so positive. What if—"

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"Of course I'm positive," said Celia. "I know Artie. And besides, aren't you forgetting? This is *number three*."

Shirlee gaped. "Three? All I heard about is the one that happened a couple of months ago."

"No, there was another. You remember you wondered what became of his old car? Well, he drove it up to the top of the cliff near Silverado Road and let it fall over into the canyon. I figured he was up to something when he left for work in that old clunker. He loved to show off his new Volvo—and there it was, sitting in the garage."

"You knew—right away?"

"Sure, especially when his green pants and polka-dot shirt were missing. I bought them for him, thought he should dress modern. He hated them. Never wore them. He put them in the car before he pushed it over. Don't ask me why. The car caught fire and everything was burned up. Naturally, no body was found. I knew he wasn't dead, but I had a hard time convincing Sergeant Herrick."

"Why does Artie do it?"

"There are reasons," Celia said evasively. It was evident this was one subject she wouldn't discuss.

At the door Shirlee turned to ask a question. "Artie—when do you think—?"

"He'll return? Let me see. Last time took a week. This time he'll be more ashamed. I'd say about two weeks."

The next evening Sergeant Herrick arrived at the Smerz home and, finger on the bell, reflected that this was his third visit. Although his official presence seemed necessary, the occasion appeared even more futile and confusing than the previous ones. Upon entering, he donned an attitude of solemn sympathy and made several tactful remarks, feeling ridiculous as he did so. In this awkward situation he received no help from Celia, who merely grinned and nodded.

"He hasn't—ah—returned?" Herrick asked.

"Too early."

He sat back and considered. His attempts on preceding visits to probe Artie's behavior had produced nothing but bewilderment. There was no sense in asking Celia the same questions. He inspected her with irritation. "You shouldn't be so certain. This time could be—quite serious."

She showed a slight concern. "Why do you say so?"

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"Well, in this case matters might have been taken out of his hands. He was very close to the flames. Suppose he was knocked unconscious by some falling object? Or overcome by the powerful fumes?"

"I don't believe it," she said.

Herrick sighed. The possibility didn't sound convincing even to him. He tried to swallow a sudden resentment. While Artie, perfectly alive, was hiding out someplace the combined police and fire departments of Rivertown had no choice but to conduct a backbreaking hunt through a mountain of charred ruins. With a man supposedly missing, Herrick, as an officer of the law, had to follow the expected procedures. He glared at Celia. "We've started searching through the debris. I've got eighteen men there—it's going to be a tough job."

Celia stared, incredulous. "No, you couldn't. You know it's a waste of taxpayers' money. Herrick, I'm surprised at you."

"Don't tell me about taxpayers' money," Herrick snapped. "My duty is clear." He controlled his anger. "You should understand one thing. Even if Artie, well, went in there, we might still find nothing definite. The intense heat of the chemicals, everything reduced to ashes."

Celia shrugged. "He's not there. Waste your time if you want."

As the policeman marched in annoyance down the stairs, she called after him. "Don't worry. I'll let you know the minute he returns."

An hour later, Celia's TV watching was interrupted by the sharp ring of the doorbell. She arose impatiently, muttering, "I don't think I can take another condolence call." At the door stood Ray Miller, the agent for National Integrity Insurance. "You!" she said. "I thought I told you last time—"

"Oh, ah, this occasion things seem a little different," he said. Without invitation, he slid into a chair, briefcase on his lap.

"Don't you have anything better to do?" she asked in disgust. "I'll tell you again—nobody's going to try to collect on that policy."

"Well," Miller said, "fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money. And I've talked to Sergeant Herrick. There is the possibility of an, ah, accident. That could rule out suicide, and the company might be in a position—"

"The company would be in *no* position," she said. "With Artie's record they'd be insane to pay any money."

"National Integrity prides itself on paying all legitimate claims," he announced.

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"I'll tell you once more," she said wearily. "Nobody's filing a claim."

He opened his briefcase and riffled through the papers. "Let me see, your husband's age—" His voice trailed off. He was not certain whether to say "is" or "was" thirty-six. At the thought of death he made sympathetic noises while at the same time noting her age as twenty-seven. He flashed an appreciative glance. She was an attractive woman and had a neat little home, all paid for. He reflected that if Artie didn't return there'd probably be quite a few men coming around. His eyes focused again on the thirty-six and his tongue clicked in distress.

"So young, and so much life unfulfilled." He became aware of Celia's exasperated gaze and made a hasty correction. "That is, if anything has happened—"

"Artie will be all fulfilled," said Celia, "and it's late and I'm very tired."

Before leaving, he attempted the company's reassuring phrase, "In times of sorrow National Integrity—"

"Some other time," said Celia, her hand impatient on the knob of the open door.

The next day, performing her household tasks while singing along with the radio, Celia heard a knock, glanced through the window, and recognized the heavy frame of Sid Weiss, the office supervisor at the Forbes Paper Company. Sid, Artie's boss, had in past months demonstrated an unusual patience and understanding.

He entered, his face set in a soothing smile while he struggled with feelings of uncertainty. In a case of death, some expression of condolence was expected. But, after all, Artie's previous deaths had been false alarms. On the other hand, this one might be serious, Sergeant Herrick had said. The main idea was to console Celia, no matter what. Sid glowed at the thought. A bachelor, Sid found it difficult to suppress the covetous gleam that lit his eyes whenever he encountered Celia. His urge to voice his admiration and desire had been rudely choked off by Artie's reappearances.

Sid's approval of Celia was about as strong as the private contempt he felt for Artie. In public and at work he was given to slapping Artie on the back and pretending a bluff friendship, but at times the hearty words caught in his throat and almost made him gag.

He beamed at Celia and ventured an opening sympathy. "A terrible thing—what can I say?"

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"Really," Celia said. "Let's avoid repetition."

Sid fumbled for words, a little disconcerted. "Still, I would like to offer my reassurance that—"

"I know. It's very kind of you. Artie's job will be held open for him, right?"

"Of course. This time—how long do you think?"

"Give him about two weeks."

"Fine, fine." Sid managed a cheerful boom to his voice while despair flooded his interior. Celia seemed so damned sure. It was enough to crush all hope. "We'll be glad to see the little guy back. Maybe the gang should get together and—" He clamped down on his tongue. One could hardly consider throwing a party for a man who vanished as often as Artie and who, on this occasion, just *might* be dead. He again recalled Sergeant Herrick's opinion and sought some comfort in it. Artie had been too close to the fire. A huge girder might have flattened him or he could have been gassed by the fumes. Meanwhile, Sid reflected gloomily, if the search didn't reveal anything, all he could do was sweat it out.

Upon leaving, he squeezed Celia's hand fervently and patted her shoulder. "I'll be back again," he promised, "to help you in your—ah—time of need."

Celia watched him stumble on the stairs as he twisted around to wave goodbye. She was too perceptive to mistake the eager glow in his eyes for sympathy or compassion. At each of Artie's disappearances he had grown bolder. She decided she must continue to act naively unaware of his intentions.

Two days later Herrick called to make his report. His men had sifted through the ashes and found nothing. "No trace of a body," he said.

"Naturally," said Celia.

His gaze was severe. "I've cautioned you. In a fire of that type, well, it's like cremation. I talked to Loret again. He saw Artie surrounded by flames. He seemed in a daze and debris was falling on all sides."

"Imagination," said Celia. "Each time he tells it, it gets better."

"All right, believe what you want." Herrick's tone grew ominous. "This time I fear the worst." His own words rang so seriously in his ears he was almost convinced of Artie's death. On the porch he turned to murmur sympathy, but she had twirled the radio knob and the music was so loud she couldn't hear him . . .

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As the week progressed, Sid made visiting a habit. His question, when he entered the house, was usually the same: "Have you heard anything?" And Celia would shake her head. He spoke of old Statham retiring at the plant and of the job that would be open. "You know me, Celia," he said. "I'm on Artie's side. I keep boosting him." Actually, he had been knifing him, and had urged Forbes, the owner, to give the promotion to somebody else. Celia thanked him for his support and allowed him to give her hand a lingering squeeze.

Thirteen days later, to be exact, she sat watching the evening news when she heard an odd rattling noise at the front door. She smiled, straightened, and patted her hair into shape. There were only two keys and Artie had the other one. While focusing on the TV, she managed at the same time to glimpse Artie's gradual appearance, an arm and shoulder first in the narrow door opening, then an ear and a round anxious face that peered about. The entrance of his complete body was followed by a rumbling in his throat.

"I'm not dead," he said bitterly.

"I never even considered the possibility," she said, walking over to embrace him. "Oh, Artie, I'm glad to see you."

He returned the embrace and then slumped dejectedly into a chair. "I owe you—"

She held up a hand. "No need to explain. You lost your nerve and couldn't go through with it. After that, you were too ashamed to come back."

He gazed in astonishment.

"How did you know?"

"It was the same last time—and the time before."

He groaned. "I don't know why you bother waiting for me."

"I'll always wait for you, Artie. No matter how long."

"Oh, Celia, I'm not good enough for you. A person like you deserves someone better. If I were any kind of a man I'd—"

"Stop it. You're back again with what Dr. Hoffman calls the 'inadequacy bit'."

"Hoffman?" Artie scowled. "I don't notice him doing anything to make me adequate."

"You're not seeing him often enough. Starting tomorrow it's twice a week."

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"I won't go."

"Tomorrow," Celia repeated firmly. She got up. "I'll call him after I call Sergeant Herrick."

"What a detective," said Artie. "I was sitting in a motel only thirty miles from here and he never even found me."

"He never looked. Herrick hated to admit it, but he knew all along that you'd return. By the way, Sid Weiss has been here several times. He's holding your job for you."

"I hate the job," he said.

"Well, when old Statham retires they'll need someone for assistant supervisor. You're next in line."

"I'll never get it. Anyhow, I don't want it."

"We'll see." She was dialing. "Better get a good night's rest. Busy day tomorrow. We'll go together."

The next morning, as she sat in the reception room, the sounds from behind the closed door seemed to come mainly from Dr. Hoffman. Artie apparently had little to say. Later, Hoffman reported progress. It seemed that Artie saw his problem more clearly.

And the problem, she presumed, was still the same—that Artie felt inadequate? Not entirely, Hoffman explained. Because Artie believed he was a nonentity, a failure in life, he was desperate for recognition. The disappearances made him the center of attention—people *noticed* him.

"Three times," Celia said. "Do you think he'll try again?"

Hoffman looked distressed. "Well, it's possible. That's all I can say. We must work together to make him, ah—" He allowed the sentence to lapse.

Make Artie adequate? Celia pondered and groped futilely for ideas on the way home. It seemed an impossible task.

A sequence of fairly normal days followed, with Artie showing up for work each morning at the paper mill, returning home at 5:30 and spending his evenings quietly with his wife. He attended his twice-a-week sessions with Dr. Hoffman, whose attitude with the passing days had become increasingly hopeful. Artie appeared more cheerful and communicative. After a month of this improved behavior, Celia began to wonder if some permanent change had taken place.

Events were conspiring, however, to provide Artie with a startlingly new viewpoint toward life. Friday of that week being payday, he entered

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the bank at noon with his check clutched in his hand. On this particular day his spirits had sunk low and he was involved in a mental struggle, the positive admonitions of Dr. Hoffman posed against his own gloomy negativism. Several glances at the meager amount embossed on his paycheck served to sharpen his despair.

At this moment an unshaven long-haired man moved to the adjoining window, whipped out a gun, waved it about, and shouted, "All right, this is a holdup! Don't anybody move!"

At the bank door his partner had thrust a gun into the guard's midriff and instructed him to lie down on the floor. The man at the window next to Artie shoved a paper bag toward the teller and said, "Fill it up with large bills. And don't try anything funny."

The man continued to flourish his gun, and all around Artie the customers had apparently given up breathing and were paralyzed into position. Artie gaped. Dr. Hoffman's good work began to crumble. The situation was a dream come true, one that could never arrive again. A made-to-order suicide awaited. Artie leaped wildly, seized the gun arm of the astonished man, and jerked it. The gun flipped upward and then fell down into Artie's hands. He clutched it convulsively, the trigger and all other metal being the same to him. The gun began spraying bullets, one of which skidded across the floor toward the front of the bank as it ricocheted upward. The robber at the door groaned and grabbed his stomach, then tumbled in a heap.

In one of its gyrations the gun wound up on a direct line with the other robber's face. The man paled and let out a yell.

"Are you crazy or something? Don't point that gun at me. I give up."

Artie, like a man coming out of a trance, stared blankly at the scene around him and the gun dangling from one hand. The bank floor remained in breathless quiet with people, still frozen into position, their eyes fixed in disbelief on Artie. The bank guard ran up to point his gun at the holdup man and cried, "Good work, son!"

At the realization of his failure, Artie felt a pang of despair, but all around him people were calling congratulations and shaking his hand so that he couldn't find time for any serious discouragement. Instead, he began to enjoy the warm glow that developed from all this adulation. Cameras flashed, and his photo and the story of his exploit appeared on the front pages of the local papers. At home, Celia referred to him as "My hero."

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In the passing weeks, as he continued to be the center of attention, Artie seemed transformed into a new man. His unhappy or gloomy look, which friends had assumed to be permanent, vanished. He was seen to smile, and on occasion was heard chuckling. Celia, delighted but cautious, discussed the matter with Dr. Hoffman.

"This unusual recognition may be the—ah—turning point," the doctor said. "When people value him, he may begin to value himself, to get a sense of worth." Hoffman groped toward a familiar expression. "Artie might be convinced that he is—" He dropped the final word, not ready to venture anything so definite. But Celia supplied it in her mind. Adequate. Was Artie at least adequate?

During this period, the wounded man, an ex-convict named Jackson, had died in the hospital. His partner, Wallie Fenner, also the holder of a long criminal record, was in court for the hearing, as was Artie, whose testimony was needed. Celia naturally accompanied him, and among the spectators was Sid Weiss, who claimed he went along for moral support.

Sid's hearty words and smiling face concealed a brooding disappointment. The acute pains of a lengthy frustration had become almost unbearable. Artie's past vanishings had allowed some encouragement, permitted Sid to hope that each one might be final. But what could one do with a man who persisted in bouncing back and forth from death to life like a yoyo? And now Artie seemed to be settling down, might even become stable. All hope must be abandoned, unless—

He quivered in shock as the idea struck him. What a fool he'd been, waiting through one phony disappearance after another. A man who kept losing his nerve needed a little help. From his nearby seat he studied Artie and nodded with grim pleasure. It was time to arrange something very real and *very* permanent. He prodded his mind, casting about for a subtle scheme. But only the crudest and most obvious ones appeared and were rejected.

At that moment Wallie Fenner himself provided the inspiration. Just released on bail, he marched out of the courtroom past Artie, gave him a baleful glance, and said, "You killed my best friend. I got some plans for you."

"Amen," Sid muttered. Outside, he watched Fenner drive off and proceeded to follow him to the Starlight Motel, a row of dingy rooms and parking stalls. Parked at the curb, Sid contemplated. It wasn't safe to

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phone Fenner—later, if anything arose, the man might be able to identify his voice. Instead, he found a sheet of blank paper and printed a message in large uneven letters:

> SMERZ WHO KILLED YOUR FRIEND WILL WORK LATE THIS THURSDAY NIGHT AT THE FORBES PAPER MILL IN RIVERTOWN. HE'LL BE ALL ALONE IN THE OFFICE. THE MILL IS ON CARPENTER ROAD ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE RIVER.
>
> —ONE WHO HATES SMERZ

Undecided, Sid waited in his car, and after a few minutes he saw Fenner walk along the pavement toward the motel restaurant. In the half light Sid had noted the gleaming metal number on the door of the room: number 12. He moved quickly and quietly to slip the paper under the door.

On the way home he had another happy inspiration. There was the matter of the $50,000 insurance. It would be nice to acquire Celia *and* the money. But the company would never pay off if there was the slightest suspicion of suicide. The idea was to make certain that Fenner was linked to the murder. Something definite and tangible was needed so the insurance company would be forced to shell out.

At home Sid worked eagerly to cut out letters from the newspapers. These he reflected over, arranging them in a second message and pasting them on a sheet of paper.

> I HOPE YOU ARE SWEATING. REMEMBER WHAT I PROMISED YOU. YOU GOT A SHORT LIFE AND THE END WILL BE SOON AND PAINFUL.

He grinned in satisfaction over this. It sounded natural, he thought. Just what a convict might write. He placed the paper in an envelope, addressed it to Artie, and dropped it in the mailbox. This was Monday—the letter would be delivered the next day.

Celia opened the morning mail and read the crude message in alarm. She considered calling Herrick but discarded the idea. After all, the sergeant couldn't provide a bodyguard. Artie, when he came home,

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proved to be indifferent about the note. She made him agree to be careful and always make certain nobody was following him, especially at night. He had become a source of worry to her in another way. Much of his newly acquired buoyancy had vanished. He had a depressed attitude and was in no mood to discuss his problems, even with Dr. Hoffman.

Thursday morning produced some irritations and bickering that seemed petty at the time. The loose button on Artie's jacket had caught Celia's eye the night before. He had refused to allow her to tighten it and now it flopped from one thread. In a hurry to get to work, he ignored Celia's demand to let her fix it or change jackets. At breakfast he'd cut a deep gash in his thumb while slicing bread for toast. She wanted to bandage the seeping wound, but he merely wrapped a small bandaid around it and headed for the car. When she called after him to be careful in leaving the office that night, he snapped a reply she couldn't hear.

At 9:30, the expected hour for his return home, there was no sign of Artie. She phoned the mill and got no answer. At ten o'clock she was seriously worried and a half hour later she called Sergeant Herrick and for the first time told him about the threatening letter.

"Very kind of you to reveal it," he said in annoyance. "What the devil were you waiting for?" He considered for a moment. "We'll see. I'll go down to the mill and investigate. I'll phone you from there."

A few minutes passed and then she called Sid to inquire whether he'd seen Artie. In a state of nervous suspense, Sid had been pacing the floor, wondering if Fenner had gone to the mill and what had happened there. He spoke soothingly to Celia and told her he'd be right over. When he hung up he exhaled with relief and grinned elatedly. It looked as though his scheme had worked. "Artie, old boy, I think you've really disappeared," he said, and added with a chuckle, "from this world."

At Celia's he sat close to her on the sofa and told her not to be concerned, Artie would show up.

"Ordinarily I wouldn't worry," she said. "I know Artie's tricks. But this time there's that letter and, well—" He patted her hand.

The phone rang and she hastened to answer. Herrick's hesitance and brief remarks made it evident that something was wrong. At the mill he'd found the door open, lights on, and no one around. The police would have to make a thorough search of the whole area. Celia knew he was withholding information.

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"We've got a pickup out on Fenner," he said. "I'll let you know if anything definite turns up."

It wasn't until the next day, late in the afternoon, that Herrick arrived at the house to report events. Sid, eager to offer consolation, had come earlier.

"Artie?" Celia asked.

Herrick shook his head. "Haven't found him." He waved her to a seat. By his manner she understood he was preparing her for bad news. "Well," he said slowly, "there was some kind of fight at the office. Chairs were overturned, papers scattered, a lamp smashed. The papers had—ah—some blood spots."

Celia paled and her eyes blurred.

"We picked up Fenner. Naturally, he denies everything. His girl friend gave him an alibi—claimed he was with her all evening. Of course it's all a lie. We're holding him and we'll keep grilling him."

Tears moistened Celia's face. "You think, then—?"

Herrick nodded gravely. "I'm sorry. This time, well, you know the mill's high on the river bank. We believe Fenner, well—" His meaning was evident. Fenner had killed Artie and probably dropped his body over the cliff into the river. There was some evidence, but hardly conclusive. The road was sort of a lover's lane and a young couple had noted a light-blue car that moved slowly by and stopped at one of the highest points. Someone got out and then, minutes later, the car was driven away. "Fenner has a light-blue car," said Herrick.

"Well, then, you've got him," said Sid.

Herrick acted dubious. "Circumstantial and not enough. We need more."

"But what about the threat he made in the courtroom?" Sid asked.

"He had to admit that, but said he just lost his temper. Claimed it was a lot of bluff. Of course, we can't prove that he was at the office since nobody saw him there, but there's something else very important. Fenner has a bad bruise under one eye and several deep cuts on his neck and chin."

"Well, *that's* evidence," said Sid.

"We think it is, considering the fight. Fenner says he got the bruise and cuts in a squabble with his girl friend, she scratched him and threw a table lamp at him. At least that's his story."

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"Pretty convenient," said Sid.

"Right. We know he's lying." Herrick felt in his pocket and looked at Celia. He held an object up. "This button. We found it on the floor of the office. Can you tell me—?"

Celia blinked and took the button. "Yes. It's from Artie's jacket."

Herrick made a sound of distress. "That more or less cinches matters. We have no choice except to drag the river for the body. It'll be difficult or maybe impossible. That river is deep and wide and runs down toward the sea. At the end it's quite violent with several steep waterfalls." He sighed. "I just hope we can gather enough evidence to convict Fenner."

"The threatening letter," said Sid, "what about that?"

Herrick looked amused. "He didn't sign it, did he? And by the way, I haven't seen the letter."

Celia handed it to him and he took a long time studying it. With each moment his face assumed a deeper red and his eyes a thicker glaze. "Oh, Lord, Lord," he muttered, "not again."

Celia, watching, had grown rigid. "What is it?"

Herrick was groaning. "It's impossible. I can't be thinking what I'm thinking." He dropped heavily into a chair and stared at her. He waved the note. "It's a fake, a terrible fake. Look at that—perfect spelling, good vocabulary, even periods at the ends of sentences. Fenner is an absolute illiterate. We know his record. He never got beyond third grade. Why, he couldn't even *read* these words. And he'd never be able to cut the letters out and paste them in a straight line."

Celia let out a shrill scream. "Artie did it!" She began jumping up and down. "Artie, Artie, you're alive! I should have known. Oh, you silly conniving idiot!" She continued screaming and chortling and then turned to hug Sid.

"Now wait a minute, listen to me." Herrick tried in vain to get her attention. "You mustn't jump to conclusions."

Sid, indifferent to the soft arms around his neck, was spluttering protests. "The evidence—the evidence," he managed to say. "The blood, and the blue car that was seen."

Celia choked with laughter. "Artie has a blue car." Her mouth popped wide as a recollection came. "The blood! Why, he had cut his finger. And, of course! The button!"

"What are you talking about?" Herrick demanded.

"Oh, just like Artie! He planned the whole thing in advance! He

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wouldn't let me bandage his finger. He was thinking ahead—about dripping some of the blood. And the loose button gave him an idea. He pulled it off and laid it on the floor. Don't you see? He planned it all."

"And the struggle was also a fake," Herrick said in a despairing monotone. "Chairs turned over, a lamp smashed—"

"I don't believe it," said Sid. The words sounded hollow in his own ears. He fought to bolster his sagging confidence. A confused memory of his actions at the motel had been troubling him and now it produced an uneasy feeling. There was the evening when he slipped the note into Fenner's room, supposedly number 12. Could he have—it didn't seem possible—put the note in the wrong room? Now that he thought of it, the number 2 had looked like a curly 7. In the semi-gloom had he slipped the note under the door of number 17? If he had, Fenner never got the note. And Artie was alive. Or was he?

Celia appeared to be ignoring the others and confiding in herself. "He'll disappear for a while. Then he'll lose his nerve and come back. I wonder how long it'll take."

"The evidence," said Sid, appealing to Herrick. "There *had* to be a fight at the office. You can't believe Fenner's story about a girl friend scratching him."

"I can't believe it," Herrick admitted. "But I don't know what to believe."

Sid had a sudden horrible vision of a vanished body and an insurance company that refused to pay. "You *are* going to search the river?" he asked.

Herrick threw up his hands in futile anger. "I must be out of my mind to do it, but what else?" He writhed at the obvious thought. There was Artie, lolling at ease someplace and making a fool out of him.

"Herrick." Celia had grasped his arm and was shaking him. "I warned you before. You can't—you wouldn't dare waste the taxpayers'—"

"I'm going home," he announced. He got up and staggered toward the door. "And don't let me know if he *ever* comes back."

The next day Celia went to see Dr. Hoffman and tell him about the latest happenings. "I know now what made him do it," she said. "He'd been depressed for days. He never told me, but I learned that Forbes had given the promotion to someone else."

"A shattering blow." Hoffman murmured in distress. He made it plain

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that he agreed with her theory. "Of course he's alive. Safe and well—and ashamed." He wagged his head admiringly. "Cunning little fellow. Planned everything to the last detail. What ingenuity!" He coughed and assumed a sudden severity. "Deplorable, of course. I'm afraid he's still somewhat short of being—ah—"

"Adequate?" Celia inserted.

Hoffman nodded gloomily. "If I may suggest, when he returns—"

"Unquestionably," said Celia. "*Three* times a week."

A few days later several callers came to the house. The after-dinner hour brought both Sid and Sergeant Herrick. The search of the river had produced nothing, Herrick reported. "That may not be—ah—final," he hastened to say. "A search of this type might easily miss—"

"You aren't giving up?" Sid's voice rose in dismay. "Isn't there something else you can do?"

"Sure, there is—if I only knew what I was looking for." Herrick glared at him. "How does this strike you?" he asked sarcastically. "I'll put out an A.P.B. just for laughs: *Find Artie Smerz—dead or alive.*" He snorted in disgust and stalked out.

Sid, deep in gloom, realized that a cheerful chatter was reaching his ears. It came from Celia, who was smiling and talking.

"I have to tell you this," she said. "Ray Miller, the insurance agent, was here. He recited that same old spiel, you know, 'National Integrity prides itself—'. He thought that with the case against Fenner the company might have to recognize a claim and pay the money." She chuckled. "Naturally I told him they *can't* pay if nobody files a claim. And of course—"

"Nobody's filing," Sid said mechanically. He wondered if the situation deserved one last desperate effort. "Honestly, Celia, this time things look pretty bad. All this waiting you do—"

"I don't mind," she said, her voice almost gay. "Like I told Artie, I'll wait for him forever."

Vague sounds floated toward Sid and seemed to turn his ears into echo chambers. The words "wait" and "forever" wouldn't stop vibrating. His eyes blurred, and before him, like a vast painting, the weeks and months stretched far into the distance.

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The Most Unusual Snatch

by Lawrence Block

They grabbed Carole Butler a few minutes before midnight just a block and a half from her own front door. It never would have happened if her father had let her take the car. But she was six months shy of eighteen, and the law said you had to be eighteen to drive at night, and her father was a great believer in the law. So she had taken the bus, got off two blocks from her house, and walked half a block before a tall thin man with his hat down over his eyes appeared suddenly and asked her the time.

She was about to tell him to go buy his own watch when an arm came around her from behind and a damp cloth fastened over her mouth and nose. It smelled like a hospital room.

She heard voices, faintly, as if from far away. "Not too long, you don't want to kill her."

"What's the difference? Kill her now or kill her later, she's just as dead."

"You kill her now and she can't make the phone call."

There was more, but she didn't hear it. The chloroform did its work and she sagged, limp, unconscious.

At first, when she came to, groggy and weak and sick to her stomach, she thought she had been taken to a hospital. Then she realized it was just the smell of the cholorform. Her head seemed awash in the stuff. She breathed steadily, in and out, in and out, stayed where she was and didn't open her eyes.

She heard the same two voices she had heard before. One was assuring the other that everything would go right on schedule, that they couldn't miss. "Seventy-five thou," he said several times. "Wait another hour, let him sweat a little. Then call him and tell him it'll cost him seventy-five thou to see his darling daughter again. That's all we tell him, just that we got her, and the price. Then we let him stew in it for another two hours."

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"Why drag it out?"

"Because it has to drag until morning anyway. He's not going to have that kind of bread around the house. He'll have to go on the send for it, and that means nine o'clock when the banks open. Give him the whole message right away and he'll have too much time to get nervous and call copper. But space it out just right and we'll have him on the string until morning, and then he can go straight to the bank and get the money ready."

Carole opened her eyes slowly, carefully. The one who was doing most of the talking was the same tall thin man who had asked her the time. He was less than beautiful, she noticed. His nose was lopsided, angling off to the left as though it had been broken and improperly reset. His chin was scarcely there at all. He ought to wear a goatee, she thought. He would still be no thing of beauty, but it might help.

The other one was shorter, heavier, and younger, no more than ten years older than Carole. He had wide shoulders, close-set eyes, and a generally stupid face, but he wasn't altogether bad-looking. Not bad at all she told herself. Between the two of them, they seemed to have kidnapped her. She wanted to laugh out loud.

"Better cool it," the younger one said. "Looks like she's coming out of it."

She picked up her cue, making a great show of blinking her eyes vacantly and yawning and stretching. Stretching was difficult, as she seemed to be tied to a chair. It was an odd sensation. She had never been tied up before, and she didn't care for it.

"Hey," she said, "where am I?"

She could have answered the question herself. She was, to judge from appearances, in an especially squalid shack. The shack itself was fairly close to a highway, judging from the traffic noises. If she had to guess, she would place the location somewhere below the southern edge of the city, probably a few hundred yards off Highway 130 near the river. There were plenty of empty fishing shacks there, she remembered, and it was a fair bet that this was one of them.

"Now just take it easy, Carole," the thin man said. "You take it easy and nothing's going to happen to you."

"You kidnapped me."

"You just take it easy and—"

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She squealed with joy. "This is too much! You've actually kidnapped me. Oh, this is wild! Did you call my old man yet?"

"No."

"Will you let me listen when you do?" She started to giggle. "I'd give anything to see his face when you tell him. He'll split. He'll just fall apart."

They were both staring at her, open-mouthed. The younger man said, "You sound happy about it."

"Happy? Of course I'm happy. This is the most exciting thing that ever happened to me!"

"But your father—"

"I hope you gouge him good," she went on. "He's the cheapest old man on earth. He wouldn't pay a nickel to see a man go over the Falls. How much are you going to ask?"

"Never mind," the thin man said.

"I just hope it's enough. He can afford plenty."

The thin man grinned. "How does seventy-five thousand dollars strike you?"

"Not enough. He can afford more than that," she said. "He's very rich, but you wouldn't know it the way he hangs onto his money."

"Seventy-five thou is pretty rich."

She shook her head. "Not for him. He could afford plenty more."

"It's not what he can afford, it's what he can raise in a hurry. We don't want to drag this out for days. We want it over by morning."

She thought for a minute. "Well, it's your funeral," she said pertly.

The shorter man approached her. "What do you mean by that?"

"Forget it, Ray," his partner said.

"No, I want to find out. What did you mean by that, honey?"

She looked up at them. "Well, I don't want to tell you your business," she said slowly. "I mean, you're the kidnappers. You're the ones who are taking all the chances. I mean, if you get caught they can really give you a hard time, can't they?"

"The chair," the thin man said.

"That's what I thought, so I don't want to tell you how to do all this, but there *was* something that occurred to me."

"Let's hear it."

"Well, first of all, I don't think it's a good idea to wait for morning. You wouldn't know it, of course, but he doesn't have to wait until the banks

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open. He's a doctor, and I know he gets paid in cash a lot of the time, cash that never goes to the bank, never gets entered in the books. It goes straight into the safe in the basement and stays there."

"Taxes—"

"Something like that. Anyway, I heard him telling somebody that he never has less than a hundred thousand dollars in that safe. So you wouldn't have to wait until the banks open, and you wouldn't have to settle for seventy-five thousand either. You could ask for an even hundred thousand and get it easy."

The two kidnappers looked at her, at each other, then at her again.

"I mean," she said, "I'm only trying to be helpful."

"You must hate him something awful, kid."

"Now you're catching on."

"Doesn't he treat you right?"

"All his money," she said, "and I don't even get my own car. I had to take the bus tonight; otherwise you wouldn't have got me the way you did, so it's his fault I was kidnapped. Why shouldn't he pay a bundle?"

"This is some kid, Howie," the younger man said.

Howie nodded. "You sure about the hundred thousand?"

"He'll probably try to stall, tell us he needs time to raise the dough."

"So tell him you know about the safe."

"Maybe he—"

"And that way he won't call the police," she went on. "Because of not paying taxes on the money and all that. He won't want that to come out into the open, so he'll pay."

"It's like you planned this job yourself, baby," Ray said.

"I almost did."

"Huh?"

"I used to think what a gas it would be if I got kidnapped. What a fit the old man would throw and everything." She giggled. "But I never really thought it would happen. It's too perfect."

"I think I'll make that call now," Howie said. "I'll be back in maybe half an hour. Ray here'll take good care of you, kitten." He nodded and was gone.

She had expected that Howie would make the call and was glad it had turned out that way. Ray seemed to be the easier of the two to get along with. It wasn't just that he was younger and better-looking. He was also, as far as she could tell, more good-natured and a whole lot less intelligent.

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"Who would have figured it?" he said now. "I mean, you go and pull a snatch, you don't expect anybody to be so cooperative."

"Have you ever done this before, Ray?"

"No."

"It must be scary."

"Aw, I guess it's easy enough. More money than a bank job and a whole lot less risk. The only hard part is when the mark—your old man, that is—delivers the money. You have to get the dough without being spotted. Outside of that, it's no sweat at all."

"And afterward?"

"Huh?"

The palms of her hands were moist with sweat. She said, "What happens afterward? Will you let me go, Ray?"

"Oh, sure."

"You won't kill me?"

"Oh, don't be silly," he said.

She knew exactly what he meant. He meant, Let's not talk about it, doll, but of course we'll kill you. What else?

"I'm more fun when I'm alive," she said.

"I'll bet you are."

"You better believe it."

He came closer to her. She straightened her shoulders to emphasize her youthful curves and watched his eyes move over her body.

"That's a pretty sweater," he said. "You look real good in a sweater. I'll bet a guy could have a whole lot of fun with you, baby."

"I'm more fun," she said, "when I'm not tied up. Howie won't be back for a half hour. But I don't guess that would worry you."

"Not a bit."

She sat perfectly still while he untied her. Then she got slowly to her feet. Her legs were cramped and her fingers tingled a little from the limited circulation. Ray took her in his arms and kissed her, then took a black automatic from his pocket and placed it on the table.

"Now don't get any idea about making a grab for the gun," he said. "You'd only get hurt, you know."

Later he insisted on tying her up again.

"But I won't try anything," she protested. "Honest, Ray. You know I wouldn't try anything. I want everything to go off just right."

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"Howie wouldn't like it," he said doggedly and that was all there was to it.

"But don't make it too tight," she begged. "It hurts."

He didn't make it too tight.

When Howie came back he was smiling broadly. He closed the door and locked it and lit a cigarette. "Like a charm," he said through a cloud of smoke. "Went like a charm. You're O.K., honey girl."

"What did he say?"

"Got hysterical first of all. Kept telling me not to hurt you, that he'd pay if only we'd release you. He kept saying how much he loved you and all."

She started to laugh. "Oh, beautiful!"

"And you were right about the safe. He started to blubber that he couldn't possibly raise a hundred thousand on short notice. Then I hit him with the safe, said I knew he kept plenty of dough right there in his own basement, and that really got to him. He went all to pieces. I think you could have knocked him over with a lettuce leaf when he heard that."

"And he'll pay up?"

"No trouble at all, and if it's all cash he's been salting away that's the best news yet: no serial numbers copied down, no big bills, no runs of new bills in sequence. That means we don't have to wholesale the kidnap dough to one of the Eastern mobs for forty cents on the dollar. We wind up with a hundred thousand, and we wind up clean."

"And he'll be scared to go to the police afterward," Carole put in. "Did you set up the delivery of the money?"

"No. I said I'd call in an hour. I may cut it to a half hour though. I think we've got him where we want him. This is going so smooth it scares me. I want it over and done with, nice and easy."

She was silent for a moment. Howie wanted it over and done with, undoubtedly wanted no loose ends. Inevitably he was going to think of her, Carole Butler, as an obvious loose end, which meant that he would probably want to tie her off, and the black automatic on the table was just the thing to do the job. She stared at the gun, imagined the sound of it, the impact of the bullet in her flesh. She was terrified, but she made sure none of this showed in her face or in her voice.

Casually she asked, "About the money—how are you going to pick it up?"

"That's the only part that worries me."

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"I don't think he'll call the police. Not my old man. Frankly, I don't think he'd have the guts. But if he did, that would be the time when they'd try to catch you, wouldn't it?"

"That's the general idea."

She thought for a moment. "If we were anywhere near the south end of town, I know a perfect spot—but I suppose we're miles from there."

"What's the spot?"

She told him about it—the overpass on Route 130 at the approach to the turnpike. They could have her father drive onto the pike, toss the money over the side of the overpass when he reached it, and they could be waiting down below to pick it up. Any cops who were with him would be stuck up there on the turnpike and they could get away clean.

"It's not bad," Ray said.

"It's perfect," Howie added. "You thought that up all by yourself?"

"Well, I got the idea from a really super-duper movie—"

"I think it's worth doing it that way." Howie sighed. "I was going to get fancy, have him walk to a garbage can, stick it inside, then cut out. Then we go in and get it out of the can. But suppose the cops had the whole place staked out?" He smiled. "You've got a good head on your shoulders, kitten. It's a shame—"

"What's a shame?"

"That you're not part of the gang, the way your mind works. You'd be real good at it."

That, she knew, was not really what he'd meant. It's a shame we have to kill you anyway, he meant. You're a smart kid, and even a pretty kid, but all the same you're going to get a bullet between the eyes, and it's a shame.

She pictured her father, waiting by the telephone. If he called the police, she knew it would be all over for her, and he might very well call them. But if she could stop him, if she could make sure that he let the delivery of the ransom money go according to plan, then maybe she would have a chance. It wouldn't be the best chance in the world, but anything was better than nothing at all.

When Howie said he was going to make the second phone call she asked him to take her along. "Let me talk to him," she begged. "I want to hear his voice. I want to hear him in a panic. He's always so cool about everything, so smug and superior. I want to see what he sounds like when he gets in a sweat."

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"I don't know—"

"I'll convince him that you're desperate and dangerous," she continued. "I'll tell him—" she managed to giggle "—that I know you'll kill me if he doesn't cooperate, but that I'm sure you'll let me go straight home just as soon as the ransom is paid as long as he keeps the police out of it."

"Well, I don't know. It sounds good, but—"

"It's a good idea, Howie," Ray said. "That way he knows we've got her and he knows she's still alive. I think the kid knows what she's talking about."

It took a little talking, but finally Howie was convinced of the wisdom of the move. Ray untied her and the three of them got into Howie's car and drove down the road to a pay phone. Howie made the call and talked for a few minutes, explaining how and where the ransom was to be delivered. Then he gave the phone to Carole.

"Oh, Daddy," she sobbed. "Oh, Daddy, I'm scared! Daddy, do just what they tell you. There are four of them and they're desperate, and I'm scared of them. Please pay them, Daddy. The woman said if the police were brought in she'd cut my throat with a knife. She said she'd cut me and kill me, Daddy, and I'm so scared of them—"

Back in the cabin, as Howie tied her in the chair, he asked, "What was all that gas about four of us? And the bit about the woman?"

"I just thought it sounded dramatic."

"It was dramatic as a nine-alarm fire, but why bother?"

"Well," she said, "the bigger the gang is, the more dangerous it sounds, and if he reports it later, let the police go looking for three men and a woman. That way you'll have even less trouble getting away clear. And of course I'll give them four phony descriptions, just to make it easier for you."

She hoped that would soak in. She could only give the phony descriptions if she were left alive, and she hoped that much penetrated.

It was around three-thirty in the morning when Howie left for the ransom. "I should be about an hour," he said. "If I'm not back in that time, then things are bad. Then we've got trouble."

"What do I do then?" Ray asked.

"You know what to do."

"I mean, how do I get out of here? We've only got the one car, and you'll be in it."

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"So beat it on foot, or stay right where you are. You don't have to worry about me cracking. The only way they'll get me is dead, and if I'm dead you won't have to worry about them finding out where we've got her tucked away. Just take care of the chick and get out on foot."

"Nothing's going to go wrong."

"I think you're right. I think this is smooth as silk, but anything to be sure. You got your gun?"

"On the table."

"Ought to keep it on you."

"Well, maybe."

"Remember," Howie said, "you can figure on me getting back in an hour at the outside. Probably be no more than half of that, but an hour is tops. So long."

"Good luck," Carole called after him.

Howie stopped and looked at her. He had a very strange expression on his face. "Yeah," he said finally. "Luck. Sure, thanks."

When Howie was gone, Ray said, "You never should have made the phone call. I mean, I think it was a good idea and all, but that way Howie tied you up, see, and he tied you tight. Me, I would have tied you loose, see, but he doesn't think the same way." He considered things. "In a way," he went on, "Howie is what you might call a funny guy. Everything has to go just right, know what I mean? He doesn't like to leave a thing to chance."

"Could you untie me?"

"Well, I don't know if I should."

"At least make this looser? It's got my fingers numb already. It hurts pretty bad, Ray. Please?"

"Well, I suppose so." He untied her. As soon as she was loose he moved to the table, scooped up the gun, wedged it beneath the waistband of his trousers.

He likes me, she thought. He even wants me to be comfortable and he doesn't particularly want to kill me, but he doesn't trust me. He's too nervous to trust anybody.

"Could I have a cigarette?" she asked.

"Huh? Oh, sure." He gave her one, lit it for her. They smoked together for several minutes in silence. It isn't going to work, she thought, not the way things are going. She had him believing her, but that didn't seem to be enough. Howie was the brains and the boss, and what Howie said

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went, and Howie would say to kill her. She wondered which one of them would use the gun on her.

"Uh, Carole—"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Just forget it."

He wanted her to bring it up, she knew. So she said, "Listen, Ray, let me tell you something. I like you a lot, but to tell you the truth I'm scared of Howie."

"You are?"

"I've been playing it straight with you, and I think you've been straight with me. Ray, you've got the brains to realize you'll be much better off if you let me go." He doesn't, she thought, have any brains at all, but flattery never hurt. "But Howie is different from you and me. He's not—well, normal. I know he wants to kill me."

"Oh, now—"

"I mean it, Ray." She clutched his arm. "If I live, Dad won't report it. He can't afford to. But if you kill me—"

"Yeah, I know."

"Suppose you let me go."

"Afterward?"

She shook her head. "No, now, before Howie comes back. He won't care by then, he'll have the money. You can just let me go, and then the two of you will take the money and get out of town. Nobody will ever know a thing. I'll tell Dad the two of you released me and he'll be so glad to get me back and so scared of the tax men he'll never say a word. You could let me go, Ray, couldn't you? Before Howie gets back?"

He thought it over for a long time, and she could see he wanted to. But he said, "I don't know, Howie would take me apart—"

"Say I grabbed something and hit you, and managed to knock you out. Tell him he tied the ropes wrong and I slipped loose and got you from behind. He'll be mad, maybe, but what will he care? As long as you have the money—"

"He won't believe you hit me."

"Suppose I *did* hit you? Not hard, but enough to leave a mark so you could point to it for proof."

He grinned suddenly. "Sure, Carole, you've been good to me. The first time, when he made that first phone call, you were real good. I'll tell you something, the idea of killing you bothers me. And you're right about

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Howie. Here, belt me one behind the ear. Make it a good one, but not too hard, O.K.?" And he handed her the gun.

He looked completely astonished when she shot him. He just didn't believe it. She reversed the gun in her hand, curled her index finger around the trigger, and pointed the gun straight at his heart. His eyes bugged out and his mouth dropped open, and he just stared at her, not saying anything at all. She shot him twice in the center of the chest and watched him fall slowly, incredibly, to the floor, dead.

When Howie's car pulled up she was ready. She crouched by the doorway, gun in hand, waiting. The car door flew open and she heard his footsteps on the gravel path. He pulled the door open, calling out jubilantly that it had gone like clockwork, just like clockwork, then he caught sight of Ray's corpse on the floor and did a fantastic double-take. When he saw her and the gun, he started to say something, but she emptied the gun into him, four bullets, one after the other, and all of them hit him and they worked; he fell; he died.

She got the bag of money out of his hand before he could bleed on it.

The rest wasn't too difficult. She took the rope with which she'd been tied and rubbed it back and forth on the chair leg until it finally frayed through. Behind the cabin she found a toolshed. She used a shovel, dug a shallow pit, dropped the money into it, filled in the hole. She carried the gun down to the water's edge, wiped it free of fingerprints, and heaved it into the creek.

Finally, when just the right amount of time had passed, she walked out to the highway and kept going until she found a telephone, a highway emergency booth.

"Just stay right where you are," her father said. "Don't call the police. I'll come for you."

"Hurry. Daddy. I'm so scared."

He picked her up. She was shaking, and he held her in his arms and soothed her.

"I was so frightened," she said. "And then when the one man came back with the ransom money, the other man took out a gun and shot him and the third man, and then the man who did the shooting, he and the woman ran away in their other car. I was sure they were going to kill me but the man said not to bother, the gun was empty and it didn't matter

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now. The woman wanted to kill me with the knife but she didn't. I was sure she would. Oh, Daddy—"

"It's all right now," he said. "Everything's going to be all right."

She showed him the cabin and the two dead men and the rope. "It took me forever to get out of it," she said. "But I saw in the movies how you can work your way out, and I wasn't tied too tight, so I managed to do it."

"You're a brave girl, Carole."

On the way home he said, "I'm not going to call the police, Carole. I don't want to subject you to a lot of horrible questioning. Sooner or later they'll find those two in the cabin, but that has nothing to do with us. They'll just find two dead criminals, and the world's better off without them." He thought for a moment. "Besides," he added, "I'm sure I'd have a hard time explaining where I got that money."

"Did they get very much?"

"Only ten thousand dollars," he said.

"I thought they asked for more."

"Well, after I explained that I didn't have anything like that around the house they listened to reason."

"I see," she said.

You old liar, she thought, it was a hundred thousand dollars, and I know it. And it's mine now. Mine.

"Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money," she said. "I mean, it's a lot for you to lose."

"It doesn't matter."

"If you called the police, maybe they could get it back."

He shuddered visibly, and she held back laughter. "It doesn't matter," he said. "All that matters is that we got you back safe and sound. That's more important than all the money in the world."

"Oh, Daddy," she said, hugging him, "oh, I love you, I love you so much!"

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A Murder Is Arranged

by Nedra Tyre

Mary must murder her husband. There was nothing else to do. She hadn't the slightest doubt about it.

She had forgiven John everything except for his actions these last few weeks.

No, that wasn't putting it accurately. She hadn't forgiven him anything. Until recently, there had been nothing to forgive, no matter what people might have thought.

John was the ideal mate for her. What would her life have been without him? When she thought of the husbands of her friends—those dull, earnest, aspiring types—she shuddered. How blessed she had been to have John instead of one of them.

John was exactly right for her.

Her mother, her sisters, aunts, cousins, and friends had said she was too good for John—though, mind you, they admitted he was fascinating, a real charmer, the best company in the world. What they deplored was that John wrapped her around his little finger. That was what they all harped upon. She did what he wanted, she danced to his tune.

They twitted her that no matter what she thought, John didn't put the sun in the sky. They were wrong—John had put the sun in her sky, he *was* the sun in her sky.

If only they could have realized what had happened. She was no longer dancing to John's tune. She wasn't being twisted around his little finger.

She was about to murder him.

The only hindrance was that she had no idea how to murder John. Exactly how did a self-respecting woman go about killing her husband?

Why hadn't she learned how to shoot from her father and brothers? Marksmen all, they could so easily have taught her how to reach John's heart with one bullet—but there would be an awful noise and no doubt a great deal of blood. Besides, if she shot John her relatives and friends

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would no doubt say that John had got his just deserts at last. Nor did she have any intention of being tried for John's murder—that would defeat her purpose. John's death must be made to look either natural or accidental.

It had been foolish for people to insist she was too good for John and she didn't intend that anyone should crow or gloat over John's death. Because, for all his infidelities, he was everything she wanted. When they were together at dinners and parties his eyes didn't wander. Of course he greeted other women, exchanged pleasantries with them, complimented them on their clothes and appearance, but his arm embraced Mary all the while.

In contrast, how inexcusable was the behavior of the other husbands. At dances at the club, at cocktail parties in private homes, those other men began to make passes with the first whiff of Scotch, while John was beside Mary feeding her cream-cheese-and-chives dip and asking if she wanted more ice in her drink. His lapses might have been many, but they were all done with finesse while she was out of sight. He was careful to see that she lost no face. There was no flaunting of any of his encounters. Whenever he had been away with someone else he had acted like a dutiful son, sending flowers to Mama, writing cards and letters, assuring her that his love for her was deep and eternal. For a brief time he was, figuratively, only a jaunty dog gamboling down the street for a short trot and would return soon; and when he did return his arms were loaded with lavish presents.

Well, if people called that being twisted around John's little finger she preferred it to the sordid, sneaky liaisons indulged in by other men in their social group.

All this mulling was getting her no closer to dispatching John. She must murder him in a quiet, unobtrusive way. She much preferred that there be no blood.

What about suffocating him?

No, that wouldn't do. The poor man would gasp and turn purple and John was much too handsome to spend his last moments in such an agitated manner. Besides, she doubted that she had sufficient strength to strangle or suffocate him.

How sad that it had come to this—that her love for him, her devotion, infatuation, commitment, whatever it was, anyway her total absorption in him had been ruined.

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His character, attitude, and persona had altered entirely. He had become messy and slovenly. The impeccable, faultlessly groomed John had disappeared altogether, and he had begun to act like a satyr. When he accompanied her on shopping trips he would stop in the middle of a sidewalk to ogle a young girl. At the checkout counter he would make a pass at the clerk. John had always drunk well. He could drink for hours and not show it. Now his speech was often slurred. He even walked unsteadily.

His manners had become boorish. He didn't compliment Mary any longer on her cooking, but would scrape the food to one side of the plate as if it were beneath his contempt.

He had begun to speak harshly to her. *Dear, darling, beloved,* all those endearments with which he had addressed her had been deleted from his conversation as if they were obscene. Formerly he had hung upon every word she uttered. Now he often pretended he hadn't heard what she said. Twice he had told her to shut up—this from John who had never raised his voice in speaking to her! Now he had become a bully and a ruffian.

She was chagrined and mortified.

But how on earth was she to murder him?

There were no long flights of stairs down which she could send him spinning.

There was no swimming pool in which she might conveniently drown him.

More than anything, his new grossness disgusted her. How had he contrived that leer? When had she ever refused him? When hadn't she welcomed him with open arms? How dare he use those earthy, demeaning approaches when he wanted to make love? When had she ever been coy? Love was an open, defenseless plain upon which lovers met without reservation or pretense and he was behaving now as if their passion were vulgar and degrading. He made her feel cheap.

For the first time ever he had forgotten her birthday, and on their wedding anniversary instead of taking her to the customary champagne dinner and showering her with dozens of roses and carnations and an exquisite chiffon nightgown, he had yawned and said he was much too tired to go out—a ham sandwich and a bottle of beer in the kitchen were all he wanted. Then he had said in an offhand but cutting manner that

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there had been enough celebrations of an event so long in the past and he was sure she was as weary of them as he was.

Finally, what set a limit to his few remaining days on earth was his cruel reference to their having no children. "It's damned bleak, isn't it, not to have any children? Nothing but the two of us."

He really was a brute. Just the two of them was what he had insisted upon! He had said he didn't want children who would only come between them and their happiness. They were complete in themselves. They needed nothing and no one else.

John must die immediately for rejecting that premise on which so much of their joy had been based. She must get this caricature that her husband had become into the ground immediately.

Yet she owed him something for the happiness that they had shared and so, to honor that debt, she would murder him decently and quietly by giving him an overdose of sleeping pills.

Why had it taken her so long to think of the one perfect method? It seemed stupid of her not to have arrived at it long before, but perhaps she had needed to be goaded by that final insult of not having borne him any children.

John knew he hadn't deserved Mary, but he had made her happy. He believed in love and rapture, and he had loved her completely. He was a romantic. Men were the romantics of this world and women were the practical ones.

There had been many women in his life, but Mary had come first and she knew it. He went out of his way to show her. Not that he had exploited the others. He had reason to think he had made them happy too. Mary, though, was his life. His flirtations had never brought shame to Mary or made her feel neglected. They had been minor skirmishes and only added piquancy to the passion he felt for Mary. He wished he could have given her the world, but he had no knack for business, and he was grateful to his grandfather who had set up a trust fund for him shortly before he and Mary were married, and had then promptly and conveniently died. Also, Mary had her own tidy annuities gleaned from several rich and thrifty great-aunts and some cousins twice removed. He was grateful to them all. He loved women, no matter how old or young they were so long as they were pleasant.

He had a gift for love and dalliance.

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But he had no courage and he could not endure pain and he could not abide sympathy. Illness robbed a man of everything. He could not confront agony and anguish. Perhaps that was why he had punished himself when he was younger by doing volunteer hospital work in the wards filled with the hopelessly ill. He had seen so many die hideous deaths of what he now had—but he refused to accept that painful, lingering death for himself. Perhaps he had thought that he could trick life into giving him an easy death if he helped others in pain. Well, life couldn't be manipulated; fate wouldn't oblige.

Mary, however, could be manipulated.

All those relatives and friends had joked over the years that John could twist Mary around his finger. It was true. He could have, but he hadn't. Yet now that he needed to manipulate her he knew that he could.

John might have taken his own life, but that would have been cowardly. It would have been an affront to Mary, who had made him completely happy—the life she had given him was more than happy, it had been blissful. To the world his suicide would have negated their perfect years together, and it would have placed upon Mary a terrible, unendurable burden of guilt. Mary must be made to give him death. An easy one. A quick one.

He knew her so well and was precisely aware of how she responded to him and what there was about him that attracted her. It would be a matter of only a few weeks until he could make her take his life.

The days had gone as he had predicted and Mary's disgust had flourished. He knew the exact moment when she had accumulated enough sleeping pills, and the next morning he pushed himself across the bed and nudged her—she had taken to sleeping as far away from him as the width of the large bed allowed. His voice was sharp and demanding, "I want a large glass of orange juice and I want it immediately."

Mary sprang out of bed and grabbed her robe and hurried to the kitchen. She was gone only a little while and John saw her hand quiver as she set a small tray holding the orange juice on the bedside table. He rudely jerked the glass from the tray and gulped the juice.

Only then could he trust himself to smile at her. "Thank you, darling," he said, but she had already left the room and did not hear him.

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Persistent Image

by Jules Archer

The speedometer said seventy-three. Tod Rice fretted behind the wheel, impatient to tell Carol they could get the piano for Kenny now. Maybe even a house in Rye.

His impatience was also that of a husband who has put in his five hot nights alone in a dusty city apartment.

The empty parkway spilled bleakly past his headlights. Tod hadn't left the city until eleven. Country places had long since swallowed up the weekend refugees.

Now the needle said seventy-six. He was almost there—four more swift miles. Tod worried briefly about troopers.

His compulsion to get wherever he was going in a hurry had already cost him three fines that year. If they caught him now and smelled his breath—

Not that he was tight. He'd only had a few with his new client, to toast the deal. But a whiff of his breath would clinch it with any cop studying the speeding violations on his license.

A man's torso suddenly filled half of Tod's windshield.

It was a startling phenomenon. The man had materialized out of the darkness without warning.

Tod uttered a cry, almost guttural, horrified. He pumped the brake savagely.

He heard and felt the sickening impact. He shrank back against the seat, feeling the violence in his own body.

Dear God, he breathed. Let me wake up from this bad dream: I'll do anything You say. Don't make it real that I have killed a man, dear God.

His tires screeched. The car shuddered, skidded to one side, stopped. Tod sat motionless, gripping the wheel hard.

A faint hope prodded him out of his stupor. He groped frantically in the glove compartment until he located a flashlight.

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Racing around the car, he flung open the trunk and grabbed the first-aid kit near the spare. Then he ran unsteadily back along the deserted highway.

Maybe there was time to get whoever it was to a doctor or a hospital. Maybe by some miracle only some bones had been broken.

The man was lying face down next to some thick shrubbery.

Small and slight of build, he was wearing a checkered black shirt, tan corduroy pants, and black boots. He had grey hair. A red hunting cap lay upside down four feet away, next to a steel trap.

Tod knelt beside the man. He took his wrist. No pulse.

He rolled the man over gently. Steeling himself, he put his ear against the checkered shirt. He listened eagerly, holding his breath.

There was no heartbeat.

Nausea suddenly sickened Tod, causing him to lean far forward, to throw up.

Wiping his mouth, he then, with distaste, threw the handkerchief he'd used into the shrubbery.

He felt bitter and frightened. Why in God's name couldn't he have passed this particular spot on earth thirty seconds earlier, or thirty seconds later?

One side of the little man's face, he saw, was badly lacerated. A narrow rivulet of dark blood linked nose and mouth.

With shock, Tod suddenly realized that he knew the man.

His name was Arthur Gettler. He was in his sixties, the older of two bachelor brothers who had a dilapidated place about three miles from the summer cabin Tod rented.

The Gettlers were carpenters. In June, Tod had hired Ben—a strapping Goliath who towered over his older brother—to repair some rotten porch steps. The Gettlers spent most of their time hunting and trapping.

The steel trap on the road indicated that Arthur Gettler had been out setting and checking his traps when Tod had hit him.

Tod puzzled over the way the little man had suddenly lurched onto the highway in front of the car. Had he been waiting to cross and then stumbled? Had he been drinking?

Tod leaned over to smell the dead man's mouth. No liquor odor.

That would make the accident tough to explain. Especially when they tested Tod's blood and found alcohol. When they pondered the three

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speeding violations on his license. When they looked grimly at the dead man on the highway—and then at him.

What did they hit you with for manslaughter? Five years? Ten? Shaken, Tod tried to visualize Carol in ten years, at thirty-eight. And Kenny—Kenny would be ready for college.

What would they live on while he waited behind bars for those ten endless, agonizing years to pass?

Again, Tod looked down at the older Gettler brother, who stared with horror-wide eyes at the bleak night sky.

There was nothing Tod could do to bring the man back to life. Going to the police wouldn't do it. And it wasn't just a matter of giving himself up. It was giving Carol up. It was giving Kenny up.

What right did he have to ruin *their* lives? They would be lost without him. It would stigmatize Kenny as the son of a jailbird.

And it would mean grinding, penny-pinching poverty for them.

Tod twisted away from the body on the ground. Suddenly, decisively, he broke into a loping run.

It had never happened, Tod told himself in anguish as he drove off. The whole thing was a product of imagination. It had never really happened.

"I know I should be thrilled about your big deal," Carol said. "But I'm not half as thrilled as I am at your just being here. It's such a long week waiting for you, Tod. I hate it."

They were on the screened-in porch having their coffee. The nighttime smell of honeysuckle filled Tod's nostrils, lulling his senses. He tried to enjoy the dramatic beauty of Carol's silhouette against grey, moon-illumined clouds, but he kept thinking of the body on the highway. Would it have been discovered yet?

A new thought gnawed at him: He ought to check the car carefully for any telltale signs.

His fingers trembled as he lit a cigarette. "It's been a lousy week for me too," he said.

He remembered the righteous indignation he had always felt when he'd read about hit-and-run drivers in the papers. Now, suddenly, he was a pariah himself. He felt sorry for Carol.

"Poor darling," she said and regarded him thoughtfully. "Tod—what's eating you?"

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"Eating me? Why, nothing. Why?"

"You've had the jitters ever since you got home."

"Just a little tired, I guess. Breaking through with that new client was a bit of a rat race."

"You ought to try spending a week alone with Kenny. Mister, you don't know what a rat race is."

"Now what's he done?"

"Oh, nothing more appalling than usual. But it's no cinch being that boy's mother sometimes. You know you spoil him, Tod."

"Sure I do. I'm not apologizing for it either. Nobody spoiled me when I was a kid. I missed it."

"Kenny has to have a piano because you didn't. Kenny has to go to college because you didn't. But we've gone through all this before."

"Look, Carol, are you trying to tell me I'm hurting Kenny by giving him the advantages every kid ought to have?"

Carol shrugged. Then she said, "Maybe you're right. I don't know. It just seems to me that Kenny's growing up to think of life as pure gravy, without any responsibilities."

"Why shouldn't he?" Tod said defensively, pushing his cup from him. "He has time to worry about responsibilities. A man has to face them soon enough."

Tod slept fitfully. Each time his eyelids parted, he tried desperately to think about business problems. But he kept seeing a man's torso suddenly fly up, blotting out his view like a giant moth. And he kept hearing the flat, lifeless sound of a speeding car striking a human being.

Shortly after dawn he got up without waking Carol. He dressed and moved carefully past Kenny's room and out of the house.

Getting into the car, he eased the door shut and drove off as quietly as he could.

At the end of their dirt road he turned onto the highway. He cruised slowly for a few miles before spotting a likely turnoff onto a narrow country lane.

He drove until he was opposite a field of corn, flanked by the foot of a mountain. There was no house visible. He parked, pulling off the lane and onto an expanse of meadow.

Getting out, he walked to the front of the car. He examined the fenders, hood, bumpers, and grillwork carefully, checking and rechecking.

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No dents or scrape marks were visible. But in a showdown, he pondered gloomily, what would a high-powered microscope reveal?

Something caught his eye. Wedged under one of the pieces of chromium on the front fender was a small fragment of cloth. It was tan corduroy. Tod ripped it free.

He stood with the cloth clutched in his fist. Then he saw the rock, fell to his knees in front of it, and pried it loose.

He was sweating and out of breath as he placed the cloth in the hole, and replaced the rock.

When he returned to the cabin, he found Carol dressing.

"Where in the world have you been?" she asked.

"Woke up early and couldn't get back to sleep is all," he said casually. "So I took the car in for a grease job."

"Is the garage open *this* early?"

He lit a cigarette to delay his reply. Then he said, "Well, no, it wasn't, so I just came on back."

Carol eyed him curiously, but said nothing.

The news was in the local paper, delivered to their door every Sunday morning. Obviously struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver, the item stated. Police were investigating.

Ben Gettler, brother of the victim, was quoted as saying, "If I get to the guy that done it before the cops do, I'll choke him to death!"

Tod was understandably jumpy later that afternoon when Ben Gettler suddenly appeared on the porch steps. Even apart from the present situation, Tod had reason to be apprehensive at the sight of the hulking carpenter, a ham-handed giant of about fifty.

Tod had protested when Gettler had demanded twenty dollars for a few minor repairs to the porch steps. Gettler had said, "I don't like people to chisel my price, Mister, I get mad."

And he'd hefted his claw hammer significantly.

Now Tod stood at the screen door and said, "Yes?"

Ben Gettler stared at him for a moment, in a kind of sneering way. Then he inclined his head toward the paper in Tod's hand and said, "Obliged for your condolences. Right neighborly of you, Mister."

"Oh!" Tod appeared annoyed with himself. "I just read about it in the paper. I'm very sorry."

"You ain't half as sorry as that hit-and-run rat is gonna be when I get

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him. And I think I got some clues. Mind if I use your phone to call the troopers, Mister?"

Tod's heart pounded wildly. He tried to speak, ended by nodding and motioning toward the phone.

As Gettler took great strides across the living room, Kenny came racing down the staircase with a plastic ship model in his hand.

– "Daddy, will you help me fix the propeller?"

Tod accepted the model, still not speaking, and fumbled with it as he tried to concentrate on the hoarse voice at the phone.

"Sergeant Calvin? This here is Ben Gettler. I been searching around where my brother got hit. I found a handkerchief in the bushes—got a fancy initial 'R' on it—"

Tod felt suddenly faint, remembering.

"O.K., O.K. In about two hours. Right."

Gettler's bulk filled the living room entrance. There was a sneering grin on his big face.

"Much obliged for the use of the phone," he said and left.

The plastic propeller snapped between Tod's fingers.

"Daddy!" Kenny shouted. Then in a whine, "You broke it! Darn, you broke my new boat!"

"Shut up!" Tod's lips had become white.

"But, Daddy, you *did!*"

"Will you shut up or do you want me to whale the daylights out of you!"

Petulance gave way to a look of deep hurt and amazement. Seeing this change in Kenny's eyes, Tod flinched. He clenched his fists and said contritely, "I'm sorry, Kenny. I didn't mean that."

"Aw, it's O.K." Then Kenny added bravely, "I know you didn't mean to bust it. I'll just glue it back on."

Tod watched Kenny go dolefully up the staircase. The broken figure on the highway came to mind.

He hadn't meant that either. But intentions didn't seem to matter. If yours was the hand, yours was the guilt.

Cars rolled along the morning highway, pointed toward the city like a giant assembly line. Tod drove mechanically, thinking about his chance of escaping detection.

Would they be able to trace a handkerchief with the monogram "R"? Had Ben Gettler guessed whose it was when he'd made that phone call?

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His fingerprints were on the dead man's wrist and shoulder. Could they get such prints from clothing or a body? What about the tire marks left by his car's skidding to a stop on the highway?

Tod chain-smoked irritably, trying to force his mind away from the whole subject. He'd made his gamble. There was no use speculating on all the things that could go wrong.

A few miles from the city he caught sight of a slate grey car in his rearview mirror. There was gold lettering on the door, illegible because of the oblique angle.

Tod glanced swiftly at the speedometer; it showed sixty-five. He eased his speed gradually.

Tense and apprehensive, he saw the car behind him swing out and draw abreast. He kept his eyes fixed straight ahead and tried to assume a casual expression.

As the car forged ahead and crossed in front of him, he read the gold legend on the door: SKYWAY REAL ESTATE, INC.

Relieved, he slumped in the seat, feeling weak. Then he straightened and began to laugh out loud.

Paradoxically, the terrible thing was that nothing happened. Sometimes Tod thought he would sigh with relief if a firm hand fell on his shoulder and a stern voice said, "You were the one!" But the whole tragic incident seemed to fade away into a vacuum of unreality. And there was nothing about it in the local paper.

Tod saw no more of Ben Gettler. The following weekend when he passed the spot on the highway where the accident had happened he was somehow surprised that there was nothing to indicate that here a life had been extinguished.

Twice Tod awoke in the night, croaking in nightmare panic. And Carol frequently caught him in brooding reverie. Even Kenny, usually self-absorbed, had asked, "You feeling sick or something?"

Nerves, Tod reflected anxiously. Was discovery and arrest, he wondered, as terrible as living with the dread of it? In one dramatic moment of confession he could rid himself of the guilt and fear which were eroding his mental health.

At times he actually longed to give himself up. But he knew that that was the easy way out, the way out which shifted the real burden of punishment to the two people he loved most.

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He took bitter satisfaction in the fact that he would continue to be punished by self-torment. Perhaps by a divine reckoning this was a higher form of justice.

Two weeks after the accident Tod arrived at the cabin to find Carol in a state of agitation. She evaded his inquiries, but it became obvious that the trouble had something to do with Kenny, who was subdued and apprehensive all through dinner.

Tod put Kenny through the bedtime routine. When Carol finished the dishes, he had cocktails ready for them.

"O.K.," he said, handing her a glass. He could see that she understood what he wanted.

"Well," she said, pained and hesitant, "Kenny did something that shocked me."

"Oh? Doesn't that usually happen sooner or later with kids?"

"Tod, please don't try to be facetious. This is serious. It was something that indicates a bad fault in his character."

Tod looked at his nails. "Who's perfect?"

"Will you stop defending him when you don't even know what happened!"

"What *did* happen?"

"You know he's forbidden to go into the cellar alone, because of the furnace. Well, he not only did that yesterday, but he played with matches."

"So a kid is curious—"

"He went down in the cellar so I wouldn't see him using the matches. That he was trying to fuse some parts of that plastic model boat you bought him last week doesn't excuse him. I've told him, I don't know how many times, that he's not to play with matches. And sure enough, he accidentally set fire to a shirt of yours I had hanging on the line to dry."

Tod shook his head, troubled.

"Fortunately, he had the presence of mind to pull out the clothespins and let the shirt fall. Then he stamped out the fire."

Tod rubbed his chin with his hand. "At least we've got to give the kid credit for using his head in an emergency—"

"Listen. Now just listen. He never said a word to me about any of this, about burning the shirt or about hiding it in the burn-off can. It was only

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when I found the shirt by accident and questioned him that he admitted what had happened."

Tod sighed, pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. "And you're disappointed in him because he didn't come to you and make a clean breast of it."

"Why, of course."

"But he didn't actually tell you a lie. He told you the truth when you asked him about it."

"Now, Tod, you know—"

"He's a kid, Carol. What do you expect from a kid? Anyhow, don't you think it's perfectly human to sweep your sins under a carpet? Don't we all do it, whenever we can?"

Carol looked shocked. "Is that the way you want Kenny to grow up? Is it—honestly?"

Tod felt angry, cornered. Carol was being unfair. She made no allowances for human nature. She expected him to lower the boom on Kenny because the kid hadn't behaved like the noble little prigs in children's stories.

He poured himself another drink.

"I expect the boy," he said harshly, "to grow up with a normal instinct for self-preservation. You can't blame anyone for trying to keep himself out of a jam."

Carol stared at him, shaking her head in disbelief. She put down her drink.

"You've changed, Tod," she said slowly, as though her incredulity were growing. "I don't know what it is, but I've been noticing this change in you."

He smiled. "Could be I'm maturing," he said.

"This is hardly something you can just laugh off. All I know is that I want Kenny to grow up to be a decent, honest person."

"I do too," Tod said with indignation. "What makes you think I don't?"

Tossing off his drink, he felt a wild urge to confess to Carol. How long could he stand not telling her? He fought off a wave of self-pity. He told himself he was no martyr; he was a hit-and-run driver who had killed a man and was trying to cover up, and who suddenly realized there was nothing he could give his family that would serve as a substitute for personal integrity.

But as he poured himself another drink, he decided that if he just kept

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his mouth shut the whole thing would gradually blow over. The white, dead face of Arthur Gettler would leave him alone. And one day it would be as though Arthur Gettler had never existed.

Three days later his employer suddenly walked into Tod's office with a sheaf of papers in his hand. Tod was puzzled. It was something when the number one man came into your office instead of your having to make the pilgrimage up to the seventeenth floor.

Mr. Dougherty tossed the papers onto Tod's desk. "You look terrible," he said. "Wine, women, and song? I thought you were a family man, Rice."

Tod made a conscious effort to appear fresh and bright. "Why, I am, Mr. Dougherty," he said. "I feel fine. Anything wrong?"

The head of the agency stared at him belligerently. Then he said with a forced calm, "You signed those orders yesterday. About $90,000 worth of business. All the magazines sent them back this morning. We're missing six deadlines as a result."

"Sent them back?"

"Why, yes, look at your signature."

Tod went through the papers with a troubled eagerness. On the line of each order where he usually affixed his signature there was another name in his own handwriting. He was aghast. He couldn't remember having written it. But the name that was there in place of his own was one that kept pounding in his brain around the clock. *Arthur Gettler.*

When Tod finished his story Sergeant Lewis Calvin said, "So you were the guy, hmmm?"

He reached into the bottom drawer of his desk. He tossed a stiff, crumpled, evil-smelling handkerchief onto the desk top.

" 'R' is for Rice, huh?"

Tod nodded.

"Took your sweet time about showing up, didn't you?"

"I know I should have reported the accident at once, but I got panicky."

"So does every hit-and-run driver."

Tod winced. "Well, anyhow, I am confessing of my own free will. Won't that—I mean, won't it help me with a jury—my confessing?"

The trooper sighed and shifted in his chair. "I suppose I ought to tell you a couple of things about the case you don't know."

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Tod felt a sudden surge of fear. He said nothing, waited.

"When the medical examiner was first called, he noticed there wasn't much blood on the body. There usually is when a man's hit as hard as your car hit Gettler."

"What did that mean?"

"That's what the examiner wanted to know. He also found a bottle of nitroglycerin tablets in Gettler's pants pocket. He let the first report go out as death by highway accident. But he recommended an autopsy to the coroner."

"Yes?"

"The autopsy showed Gettler's coronary artery completely closed." Sergeant Calvin paused deliberately, for effect.

"What did that mean?" Tod asked and held his breath.

"Heart attack. Gettler must've been dead when you hit him. He died of a burst blood vessel."

Tod stared at the blur that was the tall officer's face. Then, somehow, his voice came out of him, hoarse and incredulous.

"But—he *couldn't* have been dead! He suddenly jumped in front of the car from out of nowhere. I saw him myself. I tried to stop, but there wasn't time to—"

"Maybe you thought he jumped, but he didn't. He was thrown in front of your car, out of the bushes at the side of the highway."

"*Thrown*?—if he was already dead?"

"Just what the D.A. wondered. That is, until Arthur Gettler's brother tried to collect on an insurance policy—double-indemnity policy, it was."

"You mean Ben Gettler threw his dead brother in front of my car? *He* was the one?"

"Why, he stood to make ten thousand by doing it. There's plenty of people who'd do a lot worse for that much dough. If heart failure had been the cause of death Gettler could only have collected ten grand. Making it look like an accident would give him twice that."

Tod got out a handkerchief and mopped his face. "He confessed?"

Sergeant Calvin nodded. "They'd been out setting traps when Arthur Gettler had one of his heart attacks. That was what he carried those nitroglycerin tablets for. This time, though, he kicked the bucket. And soon as his brother got this bright idea he didn't waste any time. He went and carried the body down to the side of the highway. Just waited there

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for a fast-moving car to come by. That's just about the way Ben Gettler told it."

Tod said nothing for what seemed like a long moment to him. His voice sounded faint as he asked, "What happens to Ben Gettler?"

"Holding him for attempted fraud. Wish we had something stiffer we could slap on the big goon."

Tod kept his eyes on Calvin. "What about me? If I didn't kill Gettler, after all, well—just what crime *am* I actually guilty of?"

Sergeant Calvin rose heavily to his feet. He was angry. "You hit that guy and ran, figuring you had killed him. If he had been alive, you certainly would have killed him. Am I right? For my money—" Calvin broke off, controlling his feelings. "At least you did have the decency to turn yourself in. Even if you were two weeks too late."

"What am I going to be charged with, Sergeant?"

"Technically, all we can hit you with is a charge of leaving the scene of an accident. That's worth up to thirty days, a hundred-dollar fine, or both."

He faced Tod, fists on hips. "Personally, I'm going to recommend to the court that you get *both*. You've got at least that much coming, buddy. And that's minimum, just minimum. Come on—you'd better get on that phone and raise some bail."

It was dark when Tod drove back. In his eagerness, his happiness, to get home to Carol to tell her the whole story he unconsciously rode the gas pedal.

His eyes became aware of the speedometer. His mind responded with a frightening image, one that had filled the left half of his windshield in a nightmare moment he would never forget.

He took his foot off the gas and swore a silent resolution.

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The Clean Platter

by Frank Sisk

Wearing tweed plus fours that had been fashionable twenty years earlier in certain conservative circles, A. B. C. Damroth, an honorary doctor of science of several universities, stood at a second floor window and surveyed the unfamiliar landscape. It was a country setting with a plenitude of trees, hickory, blue spruce, birch, maple. And it seemed that each tree had its chirping bird and clucking squirrel. The grass immediately surrounding the house was tame and trimmed, but it grew in wild clumps and flowering bushes as it moved toward the fieldstone walls that rambled round the edges of the property.

While appreciative of the view, Damroth was more concerned with the reason he was in this house on this particular summer afternoon. He was turning the question to various angles when a respectful knock sounded twice at the door.

"Come in."

Miss Mirabelle, his secretary, presented herself with the same uncustomary diffidence that had marked her behavior during the three-hour drive from the city. Damroth slowly stripped cellophane from a cigarillo. "I was just going to look for you, young lady. Now let me ask you a serious question. What am I doing in this wilderness anyway?"

"Why, you're on vacation, sir."

"That's not a responsive answer."

"You've got a long distance phone call."

"I didn't hear it ring."

"It rang downstairs. That's why I came up. But you can take it there on your extension."

"All right, Susan. You're reprieved for the moment. But when I finish, I'll expect a sensible answer to that question. Think it over." He lighted the cigarillo as she left the room, then he went to the bedside table and lifted the phone. "Damroth speaking."

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The operator wanted to know if he was A. B. C. Damroth, executive director of the Tillary Foundation.

Upon his verification, she said, "One moment, please. Captain Thomas McFate wishes to speak to you."

A click, a buzz, then McFate's normally grim voice, "Hello, hello. Am I connected?"

"You're connected, Captain," said Damroth.

"You sound miles away."

"I *am* miles away. But I'm pleased that you finally got my message."

"Where the devil am I reaching you, Doc?"

"I'm in a sparsely populated hamlet called Reed Landing. You probably are familiar with the name if you have ever studied a map of the southern part of the state with a magnifying glass."

"It rings a faint bell. What are you doing there? Been kidnapped?"

"Perhaps. Although my secretary tells me I'm on a vacation."

"When are you coming back?"

"I'm not certain. Miss Mirabelle has rented this place for three weeks and apparently she plans for us to stay that long."

"You mean to say, Doc, that a man of your eminence and age is hobnobbing around the countryside, unchaperoned, with that pretty little secretary of yours?"

"Your wit is at its usual low level," said Damroth, smiling to himself, "but for the sake of the police record, I am chaperoned. Also present are my chauffeur and my cook."

"Quite a party. Wish I could join you."

"Why can't you?"

"Are you serious?"

"Reasonably so. That's why I tried to reach you before the safari departed."

McFate's voice grew professionally cautious. "There's more to this than I'm hearing right now."

"Your deductive instinct runs true, Captain."

Now guardedly, "Is your wire being tapped?"

"Of course not." Amusement brightened the old man's eyes. "But there is an air of mystery here. Miss Mirabelle doesn't realize that I know this because she hasn't told me yet, and I haven't told her I know it. But she had a personal interest in being here at Reed Landing, an urgently personal interest."

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"Like what?"

"If I knew that, the mystery would be dissipated. I know only that for the last few weeks this young lady, so straightforward by nature, has connived most deviously to accomplish this end—that is, to persuade me to take a vacation in a place I never heard of. And more important, to invite her to accompany me."

"Smart girl, Doc."

Damroth chuckled. "And rather subtle for her age. She began her campaign by worried references to my peckish appetite which, as you know, is purely selective. She then fretted in a most daughterly fashion about the prolongation of my afternoon nap. A sign, she felt, of exhaustion. In short, she built quite a case for a vacation around all the delicious perquisites of senility."

"I always liked her," said McFate impassively.

"Of course," continued Damroth, "to achieve her goal, our pretty plotter had also to emphasize the pressing importance of certain projects under way. Miss Mirabelle would postpone her own vacation and join me on mine. A working holiday in a restful setting was the prescription. I then should be able to labor as the spirit moved me, and she would be nearby to handle the tiresome details."

"So," said McFate, "you placed yourself blindly in her hands, and there you are."

"Not so blindly," replied Damroth, smiling to himself. "But here I am. May I expect you to join me?"

"I'll drive down tomorrow morning out of perverse curiosity," said McFate. "Now if you'll give me directions on how to get there . . ."

Before leaving the bedroom, Damroth inspected his gaunt reflection in the full-length mirror fixed to the closet door. The plus fours, he thought, lent him a certain jauntiness. He found Susan Mirabelle glancing through a magazine in a room that, befitting the old-fashioned decor of the house, could only be called a parlor.

"Now to the question," he said. "Perhaps it would be easier for you if we talked as we strolled around the premises."

"I suppose so, sir."

They went out the front door onto a lawn dappled with the shade from two enormous elms. "I've known from the beginning, Susan," Damroth said gently, "that your interest in my vacation was subsidiary to an interest of your own."

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"You've known?" Susan blushed in surprise. "And you said nothing?"

"I've waited for *you* to say something, my dear. I'm still waiting."

"Well, all right. I have an aunt and uncle living here."

"And you wished to hold a family reunion?" Damroth's question was barbed with his own brand of humor.

"Not entirely, sir." Susan was too preoccupied to notice. "But I am sure that they aren't living here through any personal preference."

"Then I already have something in common with your relatives," said Damroth. "Pray tell me, however, what caused them—or forced them—to come here."

"I don't know. I only know they seem to be hiding from something."

"What makes you draw such a dramatic conclusion, my dear?"

"It didn't occur to me suddenly, Doctor. It took nearly a year to sink in. But when I look back now, I realize it must have begun nearly a year ago, when they were in Brazil."

"What were they doing in Brazil?"

"Oh, that's right. You don't know anything about them, do you? First off, their name is Plancher. Uncle Tim and Aunt Letty. They're just about my only relatives, since my parents died. Aunt Letty is my mother's only sister, and Uncle Tim has always been like a second father to me."

"A wealthy industrialist?"

"Oh, no. But Uncle Tim has always had money. Enough, anyway, so that he never has to think much about it. He's not rich in the big sense, if that's what you mean."

"Retired?"

"Banned word. In Uncle Tim's lexicon at least. He's always been as active as a ten-year-old ever since he—well, since he *was* a ten-year-old. His main interest has always been science. I suppose he's an amateur, but he's a versatile and thorough one. Archaeology, botany, geology, chemistry, entomology. Aunt Letty has been the perfect running mate for him. Together, they've been all over the world several times and in some parts of it, such as the backwaters of Brazil and Bolivia and Venezuela, more times than they can remember. They're quite a remarkable couple, considering their physical handicaps."

"Handicaps?"

"Yes, indeed. Uncle Tim is totally blind and Aunt Letty is stone deaf!"

"Now I'm really intrigued," said Damroth thoughtfully.

"Some corneal disease took Uncle Tim's sight while he was doing post-

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graduate work, just about the time Aunt Letty was losing her hearing. As the story goes in the family, they met at an experimental clinic, fell in love, married practically overnight, and have been proving the skeptics wrong ever since."

Damroth contemplatively turned a cigarillo between his lips. "They sound wonderful, Susan. I like them."

"So do I, Doctor. That's why I am worried. About a year ago, they had just arrived in Natal in Brazil after a few months of exploratory travel in Venezuela, when their natural behavior underwent a change. As I've said, first I didn't notice it. I was judging long distance, through their letters to me. But the clue to something being wrong, now that I look back, was that they began to cloak their itinerary in mystery. In the past, you see, they used to delight in sending me a week-by-week list, months in advance, of where they planned to be, even the names of people who could arrange delivery of a letter to them a hundred miles from the nearest postal service. In Natal all that changed. That first brief note to me, I remember, suggested that I address them until further notice as Mr. and Mrs. Rafael Perdino in care of a coffee exporter."

"You didn't think this odd?"

"Not then, no. Uncle Tim has a sense of humor. I simply thought he was trying to pique my curiosity for his own amusement. I figured sooner or later he would let me in on the joke."

"And then?"

"Their next letter, mailed from Fortaleza, instructed me to rent a post office box in the name of Mary Collins. For reasons they couldn't explain at the moment, they said, this was the way they wished to communicate with me in the future."

"You still believed it was a joke?"

"I guess I told myself it was, but I followed their instructions."

"And you received mail from them as Mary Collins?"

"Yes, a letter from Aunt Letty postmarked São Luis. She said she and Uncle Tim planned to return to the United States soon. Meanwhile she asked that I be on the lookout for a small house for them in Connecticut, the more remote the better—a house they could rent."

"It was at this point you took them seriously?" asked Damroth.

"Yes. I wondered why they wanted to *rent* a house in Connecticut when they already owned a lovely place here. Besides, Aunt Letty told

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me not to write again because they were leaving São Luis immediately. As soon as they were in the States, she would get in touch with me."

"And she did?"

"Uncle Tim did. By telephone. Because of her deafness, Aunt Letty never uses the phone."

"When was this, Susan?"

"Two months ago. He called from a pay station."

"From where?"

"He wouldn't tell me. He said, trying to make a joke of it, that my ignorance was an asset."

"I suppose the purpose of the call was to learn if you'd found him a properly remote house?"

"Yes."

"And knowing your high rate of efficiency, young lady, I assume you had."

"Yes." They had walked slowly to high ground at the western reach of the property. "If all these trees weren't in the way," said Susan, "we could see the house from here. We passed it on the road coming up this afternoon."

"Do they know you're here?"

"I think so. I wrote them a week ago and told them."

"Wrote? Why not phone?"

"If they have a phone, it's unlisted. Or listed in another name."

"You mean they are still being as mysterious in Reed Landing as they were in Brazil?"

"I'm afraid so, Doctor. The house is leased in my name—or in the name of Mary Collins, rather. And they had me mail the keys to it to a post office box here that I rented in the name of Helen Berry. I suppose that's Aunt Letty."

"An amazing tale," said Damroth. "It leaves much up in the air, but it explains at least one thing."

"What is that, sir?" asked Susan.

"It explains why I'm spending my vacation at Reed Landing. Now let's go back to the house for a cocktail."

"Are you angry with me?"

"To the contrary, my dear, I wouldn't have missed this for the world."

A tray of hot *canapés*, prepared by Anna Simco, Damroth's cook, awaited their pleasure over a spirit lamp. The old man shook together a

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frothy daiquiri and filled two sugared cocktail glasses to the brim. Then he speared a *canapé* on a toothpick and held it out to Susan Mirabelle.

Damroth took a long sip of his drink. "Excellent bartender we have here. But to get back to the strange case under discussion, Susan, what do you propose to do?"

"I don't know. I feel that my aunt and uncle don't want me anywhere near them at the moment."

"Well, why don't we visit them this evening and find out?"

"You'd go with me?"

Before Damroth could reply, the phone rang. Susan answered it secretarily and forthwith ceased to be a secretary. Her face brightened at first, then blanched; and her voice, when she finally found it, trembled. "Oh. Yes. Right away, Uncle Tim."

Damroth, finishing his drink, cocked an inquisitive eye.

Hanging up, Susan turned and said, "They want to see me at once, sir. And you too, if possible."

"Uncle Tim and Aunt Letty? Well, the invitation shows we're welcome, doesn't it? But your bearing indicates that we are faced with something in the nature of emergency."

"Oh, we are, we are. There's been some serious trouble down there. Uncle Tim says they have—they have a *dead man* on their hands."

The statement, as it turned out, could not be taken literally. The dead man was lying several feet inside the front gate, making it hard to open all the way, and the gate was a good thirty yards from the front door of the house.

As soon as Damroth realized what was preventing the gate from swinging inward, he ordered Susan to approach the house from the driveway. After she had left, he squeezed his narrow frame through the space and knelt beside the dead man to make sure he was dead. A blind man and a deaf woman, he thought, might not be the best judges of such a state. But they were right. Though still warm, the man was as dead as a doorstop.

Inside the house a minute later, Damroth was introduced to Letitia and Timothy Plancher by their distraught niece. They appeared to be calm. The uncle was a short frail man with gray hair parted neatly on the side. Above one sightless eye was an abrasion that he patted with a handkerchief as he shook hands. The aunt—round, firm and pleasant-

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faced—was perhaps an inch taller than her husband but outweighed him by twenty pounds. Damroth guessed they were both in their late fifties.

"Your guest, if that's what he was, is certainly dead," said Damroth after the fumbling amenities. "What happened?"

"It's rather a confusing story," said Timothy Plancher in a voice as soft as he was frail. "As for the visual aspects of what happened, I believe Letty can tell you more accurately than I."

"Have you phoned a doctor?" asked Susan. "Or anybody except us?"

Letitia Plancher proved an expert lip reader. "Not yet, honey. We have no idea how to cope with such a thing. That's why we called you."

"In that case," said Damroth, "I believe we had better get in touch immediately with some local representative of the law and notify him to come along with a doctor. Meanwhile we can cover the details of what actually happened. Susan, why don't you find the phone while we older people just sit down and relax?"

"Excellent," said Uncle Tim. "It's quite comfortable in the library, sir. Or it was until twenty minutes ago. You see, that's where the trouble began."

The library was filled with formal sets of collected works, obviously the unread property of the house's owner, but the Planchers had personalized a corner of the room with trophies of their field trips. Taking a rocking chair in this corner, Damroth's roving eye noted several tubes of hardwood at least eight feet long laid out on a table. Until he saw next to them what looked like knitting needles, he didn't realize these objects were the weaponry of the South American Indian—blow-gun and darts. Also in the "museum" area were such things as native drums, a hemp floor mat, an assortment of painted wooden beads worked into rings, anklets and necklaces, and a variety of earthenware pots.

Uncle Tim, unaware of the direction which Damroth's interest had taken, was already embarked on an explanation of events leading up to the presence of a corpse at the front gate . . . "Senor Trafagar, as he so aptly called himself, sat right where you are sitting, Doctor, and said he could not take back to his superior a negative answer. The matter was definitely very serious and was not *el chiste*, he kept saying. No joke at all."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Damroth. "I'm afraid my attention was momentarily wandering. This man was named Trafagar? And you had met him before?"

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"In the past year we have met him much too often. Or others like him. Trafagar, which is the Spanish verb meaning to trade or to bargain, is not the name you will find on his passport. If he has a passport."

"Am I right in assuming then that he was here to bargain with you, Mr. Plancher?"

The blind man laughed softly. "Indeed he was. And he was rather audacious about it."

"Do you have any objection to telling me what kind of a bargain he was trying to strike?"

"Not at all, Doctor. He wished me to give him a copy of a chemical formula in return for a sum of money. This has been the case, repeatedly, for the past year. The only difference is that the sum of money has risen from an original offer of a thousand dollars to an offer this afternoon of ten thousand."

"And the formula of such appreciating value?"

The blind man patted his bruised forehead. "In my own words—in my own foolish words—it was a method of developing a tincture from a poison paste known along the Amazon as *worali*. I was a trifle misquoted in several Brazilian newspapers a year ago as saying that, if such a tincture could be sprayed through an atomizer, it would make a perfect murder weapon at close quarters. I'm afraid I even elaborated on the idea. At least, the newspapers reported me as saying that such a tincture, introduced into a throat spray, could have a most fatal effect on anybody who might use it to relieve an irritation of the mucous membranes caused by overindulgence in cigars or the habit of endless oratory. I guess I must have said that this would be especially true of men with beards."

Damroth smiled. "Castro and company?"

"Tim understands nothing about politics," said his wife, "but he can't resist having a joke."

"But now the joke's on me, I'm afraid."

Damroth looked toward the door as Susan entered. She said, "The town constable—his name is Phelps—will be here soon with the health officer."

"And it's no longer a joke," continued the blind man, facing his niece almost as if seeing her, "for now, I'm afraid, it involves you, Susan."

"What's that, Uncle Tim?"

"Well, if you will be patient as I continue my explanation to Doctor Damroth, I think the significance of the situation will disclose itself."

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Again he patted his bruised brow. "Castro, yes. It seems, sir, that there are as many Spanish-speaking people in this hemisphere who hate him as love him. And of those who hate him, there are many splinter groups all working at cross purposes. Some are long range visionaries, some are practical property owners, some are power-hungry exiles, and some are crazy fanatics. Into this last category, I think, falls the group headed by Senor Cebolla."

"Then the dead man was an agent of Cebolla?"

"That's correct. But when Trafagar comes, Cebolla is not far behind. We've learned that well, haven't we, Letty?"

"Too well, dear."

Damroth leaned forward. "In just which way is Susan involved in all this?"

Uncle Tim sighed. "When money appeared to be of no avail in making the bargain, Cebolla and his associates sought other means."

"On two occasions," said Aunt Letty, "they broke into our quarters while we were away and ransacked our trunks, our files, everything."

"It was then that they found letters from Susan," said Uncle Tim. "We told ourselves that she was thousands of miles away. Even so, we took precautions."

"So that was it," said Susan. "Oh, you poor darlings."

"Two absurd old fools." Uncle Tim grinned. "We used to wager that's what you were thinking about us. But as matters developed this afternoon, we hadn't overrated Senor Cebolla and his little band of anarchists."

"Ah," said Damroth, taking a cigarillo from his silver case, "now I begin to see. Senor Trafagar today brought more than money to the bargaining table."

Uncle Tim nodded. "Yes. A copy of the formula for ten thousand or else, as Trafagar put it, my niece was not going to look so nice. A mordant bit of wit supplied to him, no doubt by Cebolla, who has the diabolic mind of all fanatics."

"Did this man know that Susan was already here at Reed Landing?"

"Oh, yes."

"How did you handle this ultimatum, Mr. Plancher?"

"I told him, as I'd been telling them all these months, that they were badly misguided. That is, the so-called formula was a mere figment of *my* imagination and *their* crazy hopes."

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"You mean," asked Damroth with relish, "that there is no such thing as a tincture of whatever it was—*worali?*"

"Not quite, sir. Tinctures are now being made commercially by pharmaceutical firms. But *worali*—its generic name in medical circles is *curare*—is not a poison when you swallow it. It's completely harmless when taken internally. It becomes dangerous only when it is introduced subcutaneously. So the atomizer idea was rather silly, you see. To kill a man by spraying him with it, the atomizer would require the air pressure equivalent to that used in a sandblasting gun. Probably a lot more even, for a tincture is a liquid. And I'm not engineer enough to know how many pounds of pressure would be needed to make a fine spray of liquid penetrate the human skin."

"Cebolla and Trafagar were on a wild goose chase then?"

"They didn't think so. No matter how often I explained the facts, they ignored them." Uncle Tim paused. "But do you know what's worrying me now, Doctor?"

"Tell me."

"Trafagar's death is going to convince Cebolla that I have been lying all along."

"But just what happened to the man, Uncle Tim?" Susan asked. "I think we should get that straight before Constable Phelps arrives. Don't you agree, Doctor?"

Damroth nodded and put a match to his cigarillo.

"Letty, I think you'd better take over from here, for the sake of visual accuracy," interjected the blind man.

His wife recounted what happened without preamble. Trafagar had arrived, as usual, unannounced. This visit was his third. She thought he might have been drinking. At least his manner was more reckless than was customary.

At any rate, she herself had sat silent throughout the absurd attempt at negotiation. When the impasse led to the ultimatum regarding Susan, Timothy had simply shrugged his shoulders and got to his feet. He said there was nothing more to say, the interview was terminated. Trafagar also got to his feet, looking rather confused and stupid. He really was a stupid man. He was probably afraid to return empty-handed to Cebolla. Timothy, very sensitive to moods, felt, without seeing, his tenseness.

"He even held out his hand to Senor Trafagar," said Aunt Letty. "And he used the very term you used, Doctor, about a wild goose chase. He

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added something about better luck somewhere else, or words to that effect. They shook hands."

"Shook hands?" Damroth asked.

"It's a natural reflex of the blind," said Uncle Tim. "A physical contact, you know?"

"And that's when Trafagar slapped him,"said Aunt Letty.

"The brute!" exclaimed Susan.

"Quite viciously across the face," continued Aunt Letty angrily. "The blow was so hard it knocked Timothy down and broke his dark glasses. Senor Trafagar then started from the room. He seemed to be having some difficulty with his balance. I helped Timothy to his feet and got him to the divan. Then I went to the hall where that beastly man was fumbling with the front-door knob and, judging from his lips, using some rather obscene Spanish expletives. Finally he got the door open and departed. I watched him as he approached the gate, and I saw him suddenly stop in his tracks. He performed a little pirouette and fell forward. When we examined him a few minutes later, we knew he was dead."

The following afternoon at two o'clock, A. B. C. Damroth poured a third cup of coffee for his house guest, Captain Thomas McFate, whose police security was the study of homicide. During the leisurely luncheon, the Planchers and their problem had figured almost exclusively in the conversation.

The mood was serious. Damroth said, "The town constable, a well-meaning but rustic fellow, realized upon his arrival that he was not temperamentally or intellectually equipped to conduct this sort of investigation, so he called in the state police. The health officer, a doctor named Harrington, seemed equally out of his depth, and summoned the county coroner. By sunset we had quite an assemblage."

"From what you tell me," said McFate, "it sounds like a simple case. Heart failure—isn't that what the health officer said?"

"We all die of heart failure more or less," said Damroth.

"But you said you examined the body with the health officer and observed it again over the coroner's shoulder. Not a mark on it."

"Perfect specimen, yes. But do you know of many men who die of heart failure at thirty? That's approximately what the doctors estimated as Trafagar's age."

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"You talk as if you were sad about this hood's death, Doc. Out of character, aren't you?"

"Not at all. Very much in character, Captain. I'm being plagued by my habitual curiosity. I believe Trafagar met a fate he deserved. But why was it so fortuitous? And there *was* a mark on the body, as I told you. A cut on the palm of his right hand."

"Inflicted when he struck Plancher, as you also told me. The broken glass, remember?"

"Tentatively that's the official view, Captain."

McFate's expressionless face bent toward the cup of coffee.

Damroth continued. "Below the surface, however, the Planchers aren't yet absolved by these same officials. Suspicion was inevitable just on the basis of the fictitious names they were using. Phelps, for instance, still is worrying over why Susan called herself Mary Collins and why her aunt has been known locally as Helen Berry. And the talk about *worali* or *curare*—well, the state police ordered an autopsy."

"Have they found Cebolla?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"And the autopsy's results?"

"They should be known by now. I believe I'll give Harrington a ring." Damroth arose and walked to the phone.

McFate's next question followed him. "Do you think there might be something to this atomizer technique of using the poison?"

"This morning I called a toxicologist I know in New York. We had a most interesting exchange on *curare*. He definitely ruled out the spray theory." Damroth consulted the phone directory and then dialed a number. "Doctor Harrington? Good afternoon, sir . . . Yes, I am curious about it. . . . I see. . . . Well, I expected as much and I'm much obliged . . ."

McFate's ice-blue eyes held a silent query.

"No evidence of any known poison. Death is now officially attributed to natural causes—a broad term indeed." Damroth lingered near the phone.

"*Known* poison. Why the emphasis, Doc?"

"The results of the autopsy are, in fact, in keeping with death caused by *curare*. Its action is immediate but the body rapidly excretes the evidence. Within fifteen or twenty minutes after it is introduced, all traces of the poison would be destroyed."

McFate set cup on saucer. "How does the stuff work?"

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"It paralyzes involuntary muscles by interfering with nerve impulses as they arrive at the muscle. My toxicologist informs me that the physiologic effects are evident within a minute or two. It starts with a fuzziness of vision, then the muscles of the eyelids fail. After that the neck and spinal muscles weaken and the diaphragm ceases to function."

"Like drowning?"

"A good deal. Death occurs from respiratory failure."

"And you think that's how Trafagar died—at the hands of a blind man and a deaf woman?"

"I think so."

McFate shook his head. "Blind and deaf. Even an old police hound like me finds it pretty hard to swallow. How did they do it, *if* they did it?"

Damroth then smiled engagingly. "From your nursery rhyme days, Captain—if you ever had any—do you recall a character named Jack Spratt and his wife?"

"Come off it, Doc."

"I'm in earnest." Keeping time with an extended forefinger, Damroth humorously intoned, " 'Jack Spratt could eat no fat. His wife could eat no lean. And so, between them both, you see, they licked the platter clean.' Remember it now? They most effectively complemented each other. I think the same holds true of the Planchers. I think they work together a lot more efficiently than many couples who enjoy all five senses."

McFate grunted his doubt and Damroth reached for the phone, but it rang before he could uncradle it.

The soft voice that greeted him was Timothy Plancher's. "I'm calling from a location I can't disclose, Doctor. Suffice it to say that Letty is with me, and we are here voluntarily for the sake of Susan's safety."

"Isn't Susan at your house?"

"No, Doctor. She is in the hands of Senor Cebolla's confederates and Letty and I are now here with Senor Cebolla. It appears we must surrender the *worali* formula after all. I have just agreed to dictate the equation to Letty as soon as I know that Susan, unharmed, is delivered to your residence."

"Go on."

"Senor Cebolla and I have arrived at a mutually acceptable plan. When I hang up, he will authorize one of his men to drive Susan to Reed

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Landing. From there she will take a cab to your place. She should be there within an hour. Seventy minutes from now, I'll phone you again. When I have your assurance that Susan is with you, I'll complete my part of the bargain with Senor Cebolla."

"Is Cebolla listening on an extension?"

"No. At my elbow."

"Then hold the phone tight to your ear to prevent his overhearing what I have to say. Is he so naive as to take from you a formula, which we both know will be pure fabrication, without obtaining an expert opinion?"

"Senor Cebolla is *astuto* beyond ordinary. In Newark he has a *compañero* who knows all about chemistry. This man will verify the formula. It will take a few days. Meanwhile my wife and I shall remain here as Senor Cebolla's guests."

"Of course you realize what's at stake?"

"Certainly. I'll call back later. Goodbye." The connection was cut with a click.

An hour later, almost to the second, Susan Mirabelle came excitedly through the front door saying that she had been kidnapped and must warn her aunt and uncle to leave town immediately. Damroth led her away from the phone and got her a brandy. Then, briefly, he explained why the kidnappers had let her go. She listened with horrified eyes.

McFate asked a practical police question. "Where did they keep you, Miss Mirabelle?"

"I have no idea. They came out of a dirt road at the foot of the hill and blocked me off. Two of them. It all happened so fast that I was gagged before I could think of screaming. Then one of them took the doctor's car and drove it up the road, hiding it behind a clump of bushes. After that they blindfolded me."

"I suppose they made you lie on the back-seat floor?" said McFate.

"Yes, covered with a blanket. And one of the men sat there with his feet on me."

"How long a trip was it?"

"Nearly an hour. I checked my watch when we got there."

"Do you have an idea of the general direction they took?"

"Just a guess. West, I think."

"What did the road feel like?"

"Well, the first ten minutes or so was Reed Landing roads. Bumpy and

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curvy. Then we seemed to be traveling on an expressway. Oh, yes, Captain, they paid three tolls."

McFate nodded. "The turnpike. West and three tolls in forty-five or fifty minutes. I'd say Bridgeport. You were in a city, weren't you?"

"I could hear city noises, but they kept me in a small unfurnished room with only one window and that was painted white."

"Bridgeport, I'd bet money," McFate said. "Sizeable Spanish-speaking colony there too. The Planchers are probably in the same area, probably the same house. It's out of my jurisdiction, but I've got some good police contacts there. I'd better use the phone."

It rang then. Damroth answered. He said, "Yes, she's here. Safe and sound." He listened a moment, frowning. "Please repeat that," he said, and then, "I believe I understand. We'll respect your judgment."

McFate was up. "Let me put that call in now, Doc."

"Let's not," said Damroth quietly.

"Why not?" asked McFate.

Susan looked irresolutely from one to the other. "Don't you think we should try to do *something*?"

"Something, yes. First I'm going to send our underworked chauffeur down the hill to fetch the car. Next I'm going to suggest to Mrs. Simco that she prepare a tray of tidbits. And then I shall put my not inconsiderable talents to work on the creation of several chilly cocktails. Isn't that *something?*"

McFate subsided on the divan. "I'm glad this is not in my jurisdiction."

The sunlight was slanting through the parlor windows at a summery six o'clock angle when the phone next rang for attention. With an amused smile Damroth asked Susan to take the call, adding, "I think it's for you anyway."

It was. Surprise, disbelief, relief, joy—in that sequence these emotions were rapidly reflected in her face and voice. "And you're actually home now? I'm amazed. But how? I mean what hap— Yes, of course we will." When she turned back to the room her eyes were asparkle. McFate regarded her with narrowed gaze, while Damroth polished his pincenez placidly. "You won't believe it, Doctor."

"But I shall," said Damroth. "To tell the truth, Charles has been waiting outside in the car for the past fifteen minutes."

McFate said wearily, "As usual, Doctor, when I'm exposed to you for

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several hours at a stretch, I begin to have doubts about myself as a rational :op." He sighed. "Do you mean the Planchers are home again?"

"I do," said Damroth.

After a tender exchange of kisses with their niece, the Planchers settled their guests in the library. They looked none the worse for wear. While Uncle Tim recounted in his quiet voice what had befallen them, Aunt Letty served dry sherry and London biscuits. Then she took a seat on the divan close to her husband and held his hand. This was the only sign they gave of still being inwardly shaken by their experience.

"When Senor Cebolla sent us Susan's purse as proof that he had her in custody," Uncle Tim was saying, "we hadn't much choice in the matter. So we drove to the address that was given us. In Bridgeport."

"I was right about something," said McFate.

"The address was a restaurant where Cebolla was waiting for us under the name of John Harris. From there he took us to an empty house, badly in need of repair and fumigation, a few blocks away. The place was unoccupied and innocent of furniture except for a telephone and several wooden cases that served us as chairs."

As the recitation continued, Damroth, glass of sherry in hand and pince-nez affixed, was browsing idly among the Planchers' trophies in the "museum" section of the room. Occasionally he touched an object or hefted it or simply smelled it. He seemed particularly interested in a tiny gourd about the size of an English walnut whose interior contained a shiny black resinoid substance.

From her husband's side Aunt Letty watched Damroth with the slightest show of apprehension. Finally she spoke. "That's what is known as calabash *curare*, Doctor."

"So I gathered," said Damroth, still pursuing his examination of other items.

Uncle Tim, whose soft-spoken narration had been interrupted, now said, "If there is anything there you would like as a souvenir, sir, feel free to help yourself."

"I'm obliged," said Damroth. "This little gourd does fascinate me, I must say. And some of these rings. Especially this one. I don't recall noticing it yesterday."

The blind man answered without hesitation. "Take them."

Aunt Letty's grip noticeably tightened on her husband's arm.

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"I hope you gentlemen will stay for dinner," she said after a moment.

"Thank you, but no," said Damroth. "Captain McFate and I have another engagement. We'll leave Susan with you, though. I'll send the car back for her when she wants it."

As they settled down behind the chauffeur Damroth said, "Drive across the Connecticut River. It's inspiring just before the sun sets."

McFate cleared his throat. "After the sun sets, Doc, would you mind telling me what's been going on? How does it happen that this so-called Cebolla, alias John Harris, let the Planchers go free without checking on the formula?"

"I don't think he had much say in the matter. When Mr. Plancher phoned me the second time, he made a point of not wanting the police involved. He said that he had given his word to Cebolla as a gentleman that the police would not be notified. If I concurred, he said, Cebolla and he would then seal the agreement with a handshake."

"Well?"

"Under the circumstances, I concurred. I knew at that moment that our blind man's handshake would be lethal."

"I'm listening."

Damroth took from his pocket the tiny gourd and a horned ring. "This primitive piece of jewelry was carved from a thorn," he said, sliding it on his middle finger. "Now if I should dip the point in *curare* and turn the ring thus, so that the thorn is palmed, you would be a fool to shake my hand. Trafagar reacted to the handshake reflexively, by striking Plancher across the face. Cebolla? Well, perhaps this time Plancher ducked or his wife ran interference for him."

"You really believe that mild-mannered couple, a blind man and a deaf woman, committed two capital crimes within twenty-four hours?"

"Kidnapping is a capital crime too, Captain. My conscience tells me they were acting in self-defense and in defense of their beloved niece."

"The hell you say, Doc. It's a clear case of premeditation. With the evidence you've got, any prosecutor could put them away for life."

"Possibly." Damroth's smile was enigmatic. "But the evidence I have in hand will presently be at the bottom of the Connecticut River."

McFate sighed. "You'd never get away with this in my town, Doc."

Damroth nodded understandingly. "That's why it pleases me to be out of your jurisdiction. Lovely view, isn't it?"

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The Poisoned Pawn

by Henry Slesar

If it weren't for the state of his own health (his stomach felt lined with broken green bottle glass), Milo Bloom would have giggled at the sight of his roommate in the six-bed ward on the third floor of Misericordia Hospital. Both of his arms were in casts, giving them the appearance of two chubby white sausages; the left arm dangled from a pulley in a complex traction arrangement that somehow included his left leg. Later, he learned that his companion (Dietz was his name), had fallen from a loading platform. Milo's hospital admittance record told a far more dramatic story. He had been poisoned.

"And I'll tell you something," Milo said, shaking his head sadly and making the broken glass jiggle, "I learned a lesson from it. I was lying under my own dining table, and my whole life flashed in front of my eyes, and you know what it looked like? One long chess game. I saw myself born on QB4, a white pawn wrapped in a baby blanket, and here I was, dying, caught in a *zugzwang* and about to be checkmated . . ."

Of course, Milo was still under sedation and wasn't expected to talk coherently. An hour later, however, he was able to express himself more clearly.

"Never again," he said solemnly. "Never, never again will I play another game of chess. I'll never touch another piece, never read another chess column. You say the name 'Bobby Fischer' to me, I'll put my hands over my ears. For thirty years I was a prisoner of that miserable board, but now I'm through. You call that a game? That's an obsession! And look where it got me. Just look!"

What he really meant, of course, was "listen," which is what Dietz, who had no other plans that day, was perfectly willing to do.

My father cared very little about chess. When he proudly displayed me to the membership of the Greenpoint Chess Club, and mockingly

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promoted a match with Kupperman, its champion, it wasn't for love of the game; just hate for Kupperman. I was eleven years old, Kupperman was forty-five. The thought of my tiny hands strangling Kupperman's King filled him with ecstasy.

I sat opposite Kupperman's hulking body and ignored the heavy-jowled sneer that had terrified other opponents, confident that I was a prodigy, whose ability Kupperman would underestimate. Then zip! wham! thud! the pieces came together in the center of the board. Bang! Kupperman's Queen lashed out in an unorthodox early attack. *Whoosh!* came his black Knights in a double assault that made me whimper. Then *crash!* my defense crumpled and my King was running for his life, only to fall dead ignobly at the feet of a Rook Pawn. Unbelievable. In seventeen moves, most of them textbook-defying, Kupperman had crushed me. Guess who didn't get ice cream that night?

Of course, I was humiliated by Kupperman's victory. I had bested every opponent in my peer group, and thought I was ready for prodigy-type encounters. I didn't realize at the time how very good Kupperman was. The fact that he was Number One in a small Brooklyn chess club gave no real measure of the man's talent, his extraordinary, Petrosian-like play.

I learned a great deal more about that talent in the next two decades, because that wasn't the last Bloom-Kupperman match; it was only the first of many.

Kupperman refused to play me again until four years later, when I was not only a ripe fifteen, but had already proved my worth by winning the Junior Championship of Brooklyn. I was bristling with self-confidence then, but when I faced the 49-year-old Kupperman across the table, and once again witnessed the strange, slashing style, the wild romping of his Knights, the long-delayed castling, the baffling retreat of well-developed pieces, surprising *zwischenzuge*—in-between moves with no apparent purpose—and most disturbing of all, little stabbing moves of his Pawns, pinpricks from both sides of the board, nibbling at my presumably solid center, panic set in and my brain fogged over, to say nothing of my glasses from the steam of my own accelerated breathing. Yes, I lost that game, too; but it wasn't to be my last loss to Kupperman, even though he abruptly decided to leave not only the Greenpoint Chess Club, but the East Coast itself.

I never knew for certain why Kupperman decided to leave. My father

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theorized that he was an asthma victim who had been advised to bask in the drying sunshine of Arizona or some other western state. Actually, the first postmark I saw from a Kupperman correspondence was a town called Kenton, Illinois. He had sent a letter to the Greenpoint Chess Club, offering to play its current champion by mail. I suppose he was homesick for Brooklyn. Now, guess who was current champion? Milo Bloom.

I was twenty-two then, past the age of prodigy, but smug in my dominance of the neighborhood *potzers*, and pantingly eager to face the Kupperman unorthodoxy again, certain that nobody could break so many rules and still come out on top consistently. I replied to Kupperman at once, special delivery no less, and told him with becoming modesty of my ascension in the club and my gracious willingness to play him by mail.

A week later, I received his reply, a written scowl is what it was, and an opening move—N-KB3! Obviously, Kupperman hadn't changed too much in the intervening seven years.

Well, I might as well get it over with and admit that Kupperman defeated me in that game and, if anything, the defeat was more shattering than the head-to-head encounters of the past. Incredibly, Kupperman posted most of his pieces on the back rank. Then came a Knight sacrifice, a pinned Queen, and a neatly-executed check.

Foreseeing the slaughter ahead, I resigned, despite the fact that I was actually ahead by one Pawn.

Obviously, my early resignation didn't fully satisfy Kupperman (I could just visualize him, his unshaven cheeks quivering in a fleshy frown, as he tore open my letter and growled in chagrin at my reply). Almost the next day, I received a letter asking me why I hadn't sent my White opening for the next game.

I finally did: P-Q4. He replied with N-KB3. I moved my own Knight. He responded by moving his Pawn to the Queen's third square. I moved my Knight to the Bishop's third square, and he promptly pinned it with *his* Bishop, contrary to all common sense. Then he proceeded to let me have both Bishops and bring up my Queen. I should have known that I was doomed then and there. He smothered my Bishops, made an aggressive castling move, and needled me with Pawns until my position was hopeless.

A month went by before Kupperman sent me the next opening move (this time, his letter was postmarked Tyler, Kansas) and we were launched

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into the third game of what was to become a lifetime of humiliating encounters.

Yes, that's correct. *I never won a game from Kupperman.* Yet, despite my continuing chagrin and, one might think, despite Kupperman's boredom, our games-by-mail were played for a period of *nineteen years.* The only real variations were in Kupperman's postmarks; he seemed to change his residence monthly. Otherwise the pattern remained the same: Kupperman's unorthodox, Petrosian-like style invariably bested my solid, self-righteous, textbook game. As you can imagine, beating Kupperman became the primary challenge, then, of my life.

Then he sent me The Letter.

It was the first time Kupperman's correspondence consisted of anything but chess notations. It was postmarked from New Mexico, and the handwriting looked as if it had been scrawled out with a screwdriver dipped in axle grease.

"*Dear Grandmaster,*" it said, with heavy irony. "Please be advised that the present score is 97 games to nothing. Please be advised that upon my hundredth victory, we play no more. Yours respectfully, A. Kupperman."

I don't know how to describe the effect of that letter upon me. I couldn't have been more staggered if my family doctor had diagnosed a terminal illness. Yes, I knew full well that the score was 97-to-0, although I hadn't realized that Kupperman kept such scrupulous records; but the humiliation that lay ahead of me, the hundredth defeat, the *final* defeat, was almost too much for me to bear. Suddenly, I knew that if I didn't beat Kupperman at least *once* before that deadline, my life would be lived out in shame and total frustration.

It was no use returning to the textbooks; I had studied thousands of games (*all* of Petrosian's, until I knew each move by rote) without finding the secret of overcoming Kupperman's singular style. If anything, his use of Knights and Pawns was even wilder and more distinctive than Petrosian's. It was no use hoping for a sudden failure of Kupperman's play; not with only three games left. In fact, it was no use believing in miracles of any kind.

I walked about in a daze, unable to decide whether to send Kupperman the opening move of the 98th game. My employer (the accounting firm of Bernard & Yerkes) began to complain bitterly about frequent errors in my work. The young woman I had been dating for almost two years took personal affront at my attitude and she severed our relationship.

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Then, one day, the solution to my problem appeared almost magically before my eyes.

Strangely enough, I had seen the very same advertisement in *Chess Review* for almost a dozen years, and it never assumed the significance it did that evening.

The advertisement read: *"Grandmaster willing to play for small fee, by mail. Guaranteed credentials. Fee returned in case of draw or mate. Yankovich, Box 87."*

I had never been tempted to clash with any other player by mail except Kupperman; I had certainly never been willing to lose money in such encounters.

I stared at the small print of the advertisement, and my brain seemed flooded with brilliant light. It was as if a voice, a basso profundo voice, was speaking to me and saying: Why not let someone *else* beat Kupperman?

The simple beauty of the idea thrilled me, and completely obliterated all ethical doubts. Who said chess was a game of ethics, anyway? Chess players are notorious for their killer instincts. Half the sport lay in rattling your opponent. Who can deny the malevolent effects of Fischer's gamesmanship on Boris Spassky? Yes, this would be different; this would be a blatant falsehood. If I gained a victory, it would be a false one; but if I could beat Kupperman, even a phantom victory would do.

That night I addressed a letter to the grandmaster's box number, and within two days received a reply. Yankovich's fee was a mere twenty-five dollars, he wrote. He required the money in advance, but promised to return it after the conclusion of the game, in the event of a draw or a defeat. He wished me luck, and on the assumption that I would be interested, sent me his opening move: P-Q4.

With a feeling of rising excitement, I sent off two letters that day. One to Yankovich, Box 87, and one to A. Kupperman in New Mexico. The letter to Yankovich contained twenty-five dollars, and a brief note explaining that I would send my countermove by return mail. The letter to Kupperman was briefer. It merely said: *"P-Q4."*

Within two days, I had Kupperman's reply: *"N-KB3."*

I wasted no time in writing to Yankovich. *"N-KB3,"* my letter said.

Yankovich was equally prompt. *"N-KB3,"* he said.

I wrote Kupperman. *"N-KB3."*

Kupperman replied: *"P-B4."*

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I wrote Yankovich. *"P-B4."*

By the sixth move, Yankovich-Bloom's Bishop had captured Kupperman's Knight, and Kupperman's King's Pawn took possession of our Bishop. (I had begun to think of the White forces as *ours.*) True to form, Kupperman *didn't* capture toward the center. This fact seemed to give Yankovich pause, because his next letter arrived two days later than usual. He responded with a Pawn move, as did Kupperman, who then gave up a Pawn. I felt a momentary sense of triumph, which was diminished a dozen moves later when I realized that Kupperman, once again poising his pieces on the *back* rank, was up to his old tricks. I fervently hoped that Grandmaster Yankovich wouldn't be as bemused by this tactic as I was.

Unfortunately, he was. It took Kupperman forty moves to beat him into submission, but after battering at Yankovich-Bloom's King side, he suddenly switched his attack to the Queen's, and . . . *we* had to resign.

Believe me, I took no pleasure in the letter Yankovich sent me, congratulating me on my victory and returning my twenty-five dollars.

Nor was there much pleasure in the grudging note that Kupperman penned in his screwdriver style to the bottom of his next missive, which read: *"Good game. P-K4."*

I decided, however, that the experiment was worth continuing. Perhaps Yankovich had simply been unprepared for so unorthodox a style as Kupperman's. Surely, in the next round he would be much warier. So I returned the twenty-five dollars to Box 87, and sent Yankovich my opening move: *"P-K4."*

Yankovich took an extra day to respond with P-K3.

I don't know how to describe the rest of that game. Some chess games almost defy description. Their sweep and grandeur can only be compared to symphonies, or epic novels. Yes, that would be more appropriate to describe my 99th game with Kupperman. (By the fourteenth move, I stopped calling it Yankovich-Bloom, and simply thought of it as "mine.")

The game was full of plots and counterplots, much like the famous Bogoljubow-Alekhine match at Hastings in 1922. As we passed the fortieth move, with neither side boasting a clear advantage, I began to recognize that even if my next-to-last game with Kupperman might not be a victory, it would be no less than a Draw.

Finally, on the fifty-first move, an obviously admiring Yankovich offered

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the Draw to Kupperman-Bloom. In turn, I offered it to Kupperman, and waited anxiously for his rejection or acceptance.

Kupperman wrote back: *"Draw accepted."* He added, in a greasy postscript, *"Send opening move to new address—Box 991, General Post Office, Chicago, Ill."*

My heart was pounding when I addressed my next letter to Yankovich, asking him to retain the twenty-five dollars, and to send me *his* White move for what was to be my final match—with Yankovich, with Kupperman, or with anyone else.

Yankovich replied with a P-K4.

I wrote to Kupperman, and across the top of the page I inscribed the words: *"Match No. 100-P-K4."*

Kupperman answered with an identical move, and the Last Battle was joined.

Then a strange thing happened. Despite the fact that I was still the intermediary, the shadow player, the very existence of Yankovich began to recede in my mind. Yes, the letters continued to arrive from Box 87, and it was Yankovich's hand still inscribing the White moves, but now each move seemed to emanate from my own brain, and Yankovich seemed as insubstantial as thought itself. In the Chess Journal of my mind, this one-hundredth match would be recorded forever as Bloom vs. Kupperman, win, lose or draw.

If the previous match had been a masterpiece, this one was a monument.

I won't claim it was the greatest chess game ever played, but for its sheer wild inventiveness, its incredible twists and turns, it was unmatched in either my experience or my reading.

If anything, Kupperman was out-Petrosianing Petrosian in the daring mystery of his maneuvers. Like a Petrosian-Spassky game I particularly admired, it was impossible to see a truly decisive series of moves until thirty plays had been made, and suddenly, two glorious armies seemed opposed to each other on the crest of a mountain. With each letter in my mailbox, the rhythm of my heartbeats accelerated, until I began to wonder how I could bear so much suspense—suspense *doubled* by virtue of receiving both sides of the game from the two battling champions, one of whom I had completely identified as myself. Impatiently, I waited to see how I was going to respond to Kupperman's late castling, how I was going

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to defend against his romping Knights, how I was going to withstand the pinpricks of his Pawns.

Then it happened.

With explosive suddenness, there were four captures of major pieces, and only Pawns and Rooks and Kings remained in action. Then, my King moved against both Kupperman's Rook and Pawn, and Kupperman saw the inevitable. He resigned.

Yes, you can imagine my sense of joy and triumph and fulfillment. I was so elated that I neglected to send my own resignation to Yankovich; not that he required formal notification. Yankovich, however, was gracious to his defeated foe, not realizing that my defeat was actually victory. He wrote me a letter, congratulating me on the extraordinary game I had played against him, and while he could not return the twenty-five dollar fee according to the rules of our agreement, he *could* send me a fine bottle of wine to thank me for a most rewarding experience.

The wine was magnificent. It was a Chateau Latour, '59. I drank it all down with a fine dinner-for-one in my apartment, not willing to share this moment with anyone. I recall toasting my invisible chess player across the table, and that was the last thing I recalled. The next thing I saw was the tube of a stomach pump.

No, there wasn't any way I could help the police locate Yankovich. He was as phantomlike as I had been myself. The name was a pseudonym, the box number was abandoned after the wine had been dispatched to me, and the review could provide no clues to the identity of the box holder. The reason for his poisoning attempt was made clear only when Kupperman himself read that I was hospitalized, and wrote me a brief letter of explanation.

Yankovich's real name was Schlagel, Kupperman said. Forty years ago, Schlagel and Kupperman (his name, too, was an alias) had been cell mates in a Siberian prison. They had made five years pass more swiftly by playing more than two thousand games of chess. Schlagel had the advantage when the series ended with Kupperman's release.

Kupperman then took a different kind of advantage. Schlagel had charged him with seeking out the beautiful young wife Schlagel had left behind. Kupperman found her, and gave her Schlagel's best. He also gave her Kupperman's best. Six months later, she and Kupperman headed for the United States.

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Like so many romances, the ending was tragicomic. Schlagel's wife developed into a fat shrew who finally died of overweight. No matter; Schlagel still wanted revenge, and came to the States to seek it after his release. He knew Kupperman would have changed his name, of course, but he wouldn't change his chess style.

Consequently, year after year, Schlagel-Yankovich ran his advertisement in the chess journals, hoping to find the player whose method Schlagel would recognize in an instant . . .

"Well, that's what happened," Milo Bloom told his roommate at Misericordia Hospital. "Believe me, if I didn't have a nosy landlady, I would be dead now. Luckily, she called the ambulance in time.

"Sure, it was a terrible thing to happen to anybody. But at least I've learned my lesson. Life wasn't meant to be spent pushing funnylooking pieces around a checkered board. But maybe you've never even tried the game . . ."

The man in traction mumbled something.

"What was that?" Milo asked.

"I play," Dietz said. "I play chess. I've even got a pocket set with me."

Milo, merely curious to see what the set looked like, eased himself out of bed and removed it from the bedside table. It was a nice little one, all leather and ivory.

"It's not a bad way to pass the time," Dietz said cautiously. "I mean, I know you said you'd never play anymore, but—if you wanted to try just *one* game . . ."

Milo looked at his casts, and said, "Even if I wanted to play—how could *you?*"

Dietz smiled shyly, and showed him. He picked up the pieces with his teeth. In the face of a dedication matching his own, how could Milo refuse? He moved the Pawn to P-K4.

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The Lifesaver

by Don Tothe

Benny's Cottage was a cocktail lounge few unescorted women would venture into, especially on a Saturday night. Eleanor Matthews was one of the few. Five minutes had passed since Danny, alone in his green sportscar, had watched her saunter through the front door. Five more minutes would be just about right, just long enough not to arouse her suspicion when he "accidentally" bumped into her. If he waited much longer than that, he might find her already occupied with some other man. Too, the faster he could get her out of the bar the less risk of anyone later remembering his face, even though that part of it wasn't too much of a worry. He'd watched her go home with four different strangers in a week.

She was alone at the bar when Danny, wearing T-shirt, denims, and sneakers walked up beside her. He ordered a beer, then casually turned toward her. Her heavily painted lips parted slightly in a smile.

Danny feigned a thoughtful frown. "Don't I know you?" He knew her all right, knew enough about her to—

She stared directly into his blue eyes. "With your looks, honey, you don't need a line."

He snapped his fingers. "I remember now." He reminded her about the beach. She remembered too, and insisted on buying him a drink. It was the least she could do, she told him, after what had happened.

Later, in her living room, as he lowered the glass from his lips, the bourbon set fire to his tonsils, almost bringing tears to his eyes. He hoped she hadn't noticed. She herself swallowed her whiskey like a Little Leaguer gulps cherry-flavored soda after a hot ball game.

She seemed barely awake now, her head against his broad shoulder, her legs drawn up almost under her. A bottle on the coffee table in front of them showed less than two fingers of whiskey. She sat up with a start.

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"Booze almost gone," she announced, thick-tongued but concerned, her mouth twisted in a grotesque smirk.

She picked up the bottle, her hand wrapped around the neck of it like a sailor hugging a cold beer, and put it to her mouth. Dropping her head back, she tipped the bottle upright. The liquor disappeared. Her arm dropped numbly. Whiskey trickled down her chin. She smiled drunkenly, then without opening her eyes she said, "Hey, forgot your name again."

"Ed," he lied. It would do no harm, really, to tell her his real name, because— But then, unnecessary chances were foolish.

"Eddie! Yeah, thass right. Remember now." She sank back on the couch.

He knew she was twenty-six. She looked thirty-five or forty. Her face was thin, wrinkled, her cheeks sunken. With her face filled out, she might have been attractive, even beautiful. Now, with her eye makeup running and her powder thick and splotchy, she looked dissipated, prematurely aged, a discarded piece of human rubbish. She was useless to herself or to anyone else. She wouldn't be missed.

The phone rang and Danny's hand involuntarily shot toward it, but he stopped himself in time. It rang again, demanding attention. The shock of the sound to him was the shock of diving into a cold ocean after sitting under a hot sun for several hours. His hand trembled and he was suddenly, acutely aware of how much on edge he had been the whole night. When it came right down to it like this, he was always a little nervous.

Eleanor Matthews didn't seem to hear the phone, not until the fourth ring. She'd fallen asleep, a drunkard's deep, sudden sleep. Now she stirred, tried to focus bleary eyes, glancing at Danny as if to ask why he wasn't doing something about that annoying sound and reached for the phone.

"Hello," she said, then waited. Danny heard a man's voice, the words too muffled to understand. Her nose wrinkled in anger—or disgust—Danny wasn't certain which.

"I told you! Leave me alone! We're through!" she closed her eyes a moment, listening, then shook her head. "We've had it, Carl. No! No! No! I don't want to try again. No, I can't see you. I don't want to talk about it." She slammed down the receiver.

The exchange had sobered her somewhat. Then she seemed to remember where she was and who she was with—a boy almost—somebody to occupy her mind, to make her forget. She took a cigarette from a bowl

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on the table and worked the lighter between trembling hands. Danny offered her no help. She took a deep drag and exhaled a thick billow of smoke. "Don't worry—we're separated. He's filing for a divorce. They all do sooner or later."

She looked around. "Be a sweet boy and get more booze for Ellie from the kitchen, will you?"

"Don't you think you've had enough?"

She slammed her hand on the table, losing her cigarette. "You too? A perfect stranger! Why is it everybody has to try to reform me? Look, honey, I *want* to drink. I *like* to drink. I'm a lush. I'm gonna die young! That's *my* business. Right?" She broke down, sobbing, her face buried in her hands.

Danny reached down and picked up her cigarette. He put it in the ashtray and stood up. Not yet twenty-one, he was tall, broad-shouldered, darkly tanned. His biceps bulged against the sleeves of his T-shirt. His blond hair, sun-bleached, was crewcut. His features bore a strange mixture of male handsomeness and feminine delicacy. His eyes were deep ocean-blue, his cheekbones pronounced above a broad jaw. "Excuse me." He turned and softly walked away from her.

She watched him move across the livingroom. "Hey! The kitchen's that way—the booze is in there."

He stopped and looked back over his shoulder. "I'm going to the bathroom."

"Oh." She giggled and put her hand to her mouth.

In the bathroom he used his handkerchief to turn on the tub faucets. Deliberately, he adjusted the hot and cold water. The tub began to fill. He hadn't closed the door behind him. By the sound of her steps, he knew she was staggering across the living room, and he turned as she appeared in the doorway.

"What are you doing?"

"Running bath water," he answered simply, smiling. Dimples cut into his cheeks, but his eyes studied her with an icy coldness. "I thought you might—like a bath." His manner changed. "I just thought—" he felt giddy, detached "—it would feel good."

"Me take a bath?" She looked from him to the tub and back to his face. "Are you nuts?"

Something flashed in his mind, and he moved forward, bringing his

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hands toward her throat. She staggered back. He stopped, fought to control himself.

"You're tired." He breathed deeply. "I thought soaking in a hot tub would feel good. Besides," he told her, putting his hands on her shoulders, "I could wash your back."

She relaxed, and laughed nervously. "Well, this is one I never heard. But I like it, I like it." She kissed him on the lips, her breath stinging his nostrils. "What happens then? Do you tuck me into a nice warm bed?"

"Why don't we wait and see?" He smiled. "I might just do that."

"O.K., surprise me." She unbuttoned her dress and pulled it over her head. Slip, panties, and bra followed. Naked, she stood before him without modesty. He hadn't made a move toward her. She sat down in the tub and let herself slide down into the warm water. "Hmmm, it does feel good."

He picked up a bar of soap and a washcloth. Muscles jumped along his wrists and forearms as he began sudsing the cloth. Silently, he soaped her shoulders, gently massaging her skin with his fingers. His hands moved closer to her neck.

She closed her eyes. "Hey, this is service."

"Give me your hands." He spread the washcloth open on his palm and she placed both hands in it. His fingers tightened like steel bands, choking off the circulation of blood in her fingers. He read the terror in her eyes. Holding both her hands in his hand, he moved them to her stomach, and drove his fist into her midsection.

She struggled against the pain. He grabbed a towel from the rack at his side. She was wide awake now, terrified.

She opened her mouth to scream, but he shoved the towel against her teeth and pushed her head down into the water. She kicked and thrashed, trying to break loose from his grip. Roughly, he jabbed her hands into her own stomach, knocking the wind out of her. The strength to fight left her. Her struggles weakened. She tried to shake her head free from his hand, but he held her down, moving the towel away from her mouth before it was too late.

She must not suffocate. She had to drown. That was important. She had to die that way, and that way only.

He looked straight ahead at the black tile squares. Then he closed his eyes, and still held her down. He started counting slowly—one—two—

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He couldn't tell when it was that she stopped moving. At the count of twenty, he stopped, and looked down at her body.

Water was running from the faucet too rapidly for the overflow drain to handle it and spilled over the rim of the tub. He was kneeling on the floor and his white denims darkened wetly from the knees down.

When he stood up water covered the bathroom floor. Carefully, he wrapped the towel around her head. He used his handkerchief again to turn off the faucets. With the water off, the house became very still.

Before leaving the room, he paused to be certain he hadn't touched anything that would hold a fingerprint. He took his time in the living room too, wiping the glass he had used and the whiskey bottle. He polished clean the knob on the front door as he stepped out into the night.

The L.A. night was damp and cold, permeated with a light misty fog. It was past twelve o'clock when Andy eased the unmarked squad car over to the curb. Stu Blake ambled out of the nearest apartment house, one of the plain grey square kind that looks like a prison building.

Andy Ettinger smiled to himself as he watched the lumbering gait of the large young man hurrying toward the car. His latest partner must be cursing the day, not many years ago, that he decided to be a police detective. A kid thinks of all the glamour, never gives much thought to the prospect of being rousted out of a warm bed to hurry out into a cold night to look at an often colder body. A kid doesn't think about that end of it, not until he's had to go through it a few times. If Andy had a buck for every night it had happened to him in twenty-three years, he could afford to tell the department to keep his pension.

Andy reached across the car and jerked back the door handle to let the door swing open. Stu got in and closed the door without slamming it.

"That's a good boy."

Stu looked at him with sleepy eyes. "Oh. Sure. Why wake everybody else up? Just because we're a couple of nuts who don't know when it's time to be home in bed."

Andy was tempted to make a crack about Stu's bride of six months. Instead he remarked, "You want regular hours? So you should have been a dentist."

"That's what my old man always said." Stu frowned. "In fact, Sally was saying that just the other day."

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"Already?"

"What do you mean—already? We've been married almost seven months."

"Sorry, kid, I forgot you were an old married man."

"Another bathtub deal?" Stu yawned.

Andy nodded. "Over in the Wilshire District this time. Andrews phoned me soon as it came in. A woman. Husband found her dead, floating in the tub around—" he glanced at his watch "—twenty minutes ago."

"Sound like the others?"

"Andrews thought so. That's why he called me."

"How come nobody ever gets murdered in the daytime, at a decent hour?"

"Same reason babies are always born at three in the morning."

Stu grunted. "Ask a stupid question and—"

"When's the big day?"

"Doctor says between Christmas and New Year's."

"Maybe you'll get a haircut to celebrate, huh?" Andy looked at the young man beside him. Stu was twenty-five, an ex-football player, ruggedly handsome, with a head of thick brown hair that refused to be controlled. Andy had been ribbing him about it for the month they'd been working together.

"I know. It's tickling my ears. So who has time to go to a barber?"

"You're complaining? I wish I had a reason to go to a barber." Andy brushed his hand across his own bald head. They both laughed.

Thirty minutes later they stopped before a white Spanish-style stucco house with iron bars on the windows and red clay tiles on the roof. A patrol car was parked in the driveway.

A red-faced police officer opened the front door for them. "Hi, Andy."

Andy nodded, and looked past the policeman's shoulder to see a man sitting on a couch. "Matthews?"

"Yes, sir." He spoke softly. "Been sitting there, just sort of moaning and crying the whole time."

"Just you and he here?"

"Yes, sir. The lab boys are on their way."

Andy walked over to the couch and introduced himself and his partner. Matthews, a middle-aged man wearing a well-tailored dark-blue suit, stood up to shake hands with them.

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"You discovered your wife's body, Mr. Matthews?"

Matthews nodded abruptly. He opened his mouth to answer, but a sob choked off his words.

Andy looked around the room. Besides the front door, there were two other doors, one leading to the kitchen and one leading to a hallway. Two sets of wet footprints on the rug pointed to the hallway door. Andy took a closer look.

"I'll take the bathroom. You can ask Mr. Matthews a few questions when he's up to it."

Stu nodded. "Right."

When Andy was on a case he was the first man into the murder room, and he went in alone. Nobody else entered until he said so. A few rookies had found it difficult to understand, but Stu hadn't given him any trouble. Walking close to the wall, Andy made a wide track around the wet imprints.

The floor of the bathroom was wet. The water in the tub was level with the bottom of the overflow outlet. The woman in the tub, a towel wrapped around her head and covering her face, appeared at first to be taking a beauty bath. A closer inspection showed she wasn't breathing. Andy left her exactly as he'd found her, leaving even the towel untouched. A bar of white soap was floating against her leg. Andy noted it had a thick softened outer layer, the way soap gets when it's left in water. No chance for prints. Except for the wet floor and the woman in the tub he saw nothing unusual—no signs of a struggle, nothing remiss. As he studied the room, he heard Stu questioning Matthews in the next room.

Matthews said, "I rang the doorbell three times. She didn't answer. Her car was out front. She never walked anywhere. It was late. I was sure she was home. The lights were on. I was afraid something was wrong."

"Why should you think that, Mr. Matthews?"

"You see, Eleanor—my wife—she, well, she ran around. She was—was always meeting fellows in bars nd bringing them home. She did it whenever I was out of town. She didn't think I knew." After a painful pause he continued, "Anyway, I waited. Then I let myself in. I still have a key to the house."

"You *still* have one?"

Andy smiled. The kid was turning out to be a good interrogator. It took a good man to catch the subtle but important remarks in a suspect's story.

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"We've been separated for two months. That's why I came over—to try to patch things up."

If the woman had died any other way, or if Matthews hadn't struck him as such a decent sort, Andy would have jumped him right then. He could write a book just about the homicide cases he'd handled where a husband trying for a reconciliation had ended up by killing his wife, usually along with the boy friend with whom he found her.

"Go on," Stu said.

"I let myself in. I called her name. No answer, so I looked around the house. That's when I found her."

"You touched nothing?"

"Only the telephone, when I called the police."

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

Silence a moment. "That would be about a week ago. That's why I had to see her tonight. I couldn't stand being away from her. I had to see her—even though she told me not to come."

"When did she tell you that?"

"I phoned her around nine o'clock. She—she hung up on me," he stammered.

Andy came back into the living room. "Did she seem upset?"

"No, not any more than usual. Not so much that I'd ever dream she'd kill herself."

"Kill herself?" Andy and Stu said it at the same time. Stu let Andy go ahead. "You think she committed suicide?"

"Of course. Didn't she? I've always been afraid of something like this."

Andy shook his head. "I hardly think so, Mr. Matthews. It's practically impossible for a person to drown himself."

"An accident then? Maybe she hit her head. Maybe she—passed out."

"The coroner can tell us more about that." Andy was convinced Matthews wasn't implicated. "That's all for tonight, Mr. Matthews. I know it's Sunday, but I'd like to ask you to come down to my office tomorrow—I mean today. It's important."

Matthews used his handkerchief to dry his face, then he blew his nose. "I've got to work. I don't know how I'll do it, but I have to. I'm a missile engineer. We're on a crash program, and if I don't get done what has to be done by Monday morning we'll have two hundred people sitting idle."

"Sometimes it's better to bury yourself in work." Andy spoke from

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experience. The day after his wife had been killed in a smashup on the freeway, he was investigating an ax murder in East Los Angeles.

"I'll be through around four o'clock. I'll come down then."

"I wouldn't ask you, but it is important. I doubt very much that your wife's death was an accident. Someone murdered her. Is there anything you can think of now that might help us find out who did it?"

Matthews shook his head in bewilderment. "No! Eleanor drank a lot, but she had no enemies. Everyone who knew her liked her, and tried to help her."

"O.K., we'll talk about it tomorrow. You can go now."

Matthews mumbled, "Thank you," then got up slowly and moved toward the door, pausing to glance once at the bathroom in disbelief.

The experts, two of them, got there right after Matthews left. The rug was thick and just absorbent enough to hold the shape of the imprints. They sprinkled plaster of Paris on the deepest indentations.

The shoe print was Andy's second clue in five cases. Several blond hairs, an inch or so long—barely long enough for the victim to grab but she had managed it in her struggle—had been found at the scene of the second killing.

"We have a lot to go on, sir—the color of his hair and the size of his shoe." Stu wasn't too encouraged.

"More'n a lot of cases I've seen. We've got the top and the bottom. All we have to do is fill in the middle."

The medical examiner wasn't much help. "Can't say for sure just yet, but my guess is she was just plain drowned. No signs of strangulation, no bruises or abrasions. No wounds that I can see. We'll know better after the autopsy."

"How long has she been dead?" Andy asked.

"Being in that hot water complicates things, but I'd guess three or four hours."

"You do a lot of guessing, don't you?" Stu said.

The coroner looked at Andy. " 'Nother fresh one, huh?"

"Yeah, they stuck me with another one." Andy shrugged, and winked at Stu when the coroner wasn't looking. He figured rookies had a hard enough time of it.

Playa del Rey, a beach town almost directly west of L.A., lies on the coast between Laguna Beach and Malibu. Playa's beach is less crowded

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during the summer than most of the adjacent beaches. There's a lot of sand but no place to park a car. It's a wide beach, with a long walk to the water from anyplace you're lucky enough to find for your car.

It was late in the season, with one of the last good Sunday crowds. Danny always hated to see the end of summer, the deserted beaches. The usual heavy afternoon breeze was building up and the surf was getting choppy. It had been a slow day. He'd pulled a middle-aged businessman, a teenaged girl, and two surfers out of rip tides.

He sat up on his chair-tower, his eyes taking a swinging glance at the water every few minutes. He read the bodies in the surf as easily as words on a page; a swimmer in trouble was as obvious as a word printed upside down. The most obvious potential rescue was a swimmer away from the crowd, *out too far.*

He was aware of her presence before he looked down. He felt her eyes on him.

"Hi, Danny." There she was looking up at him. She was eighteen or nineteen, with long blonde hair blowing loose. She smiled and he couldn't help but smile back. Her solid one-piece blue suit wasn't skimpy by modern standards, but she managed to look sexier in it than most girls do in bikinis. Her young body would look good in a baggy potato sack.

"Hi, Maggie."

"You saved another one. I saw the whole thing." Her eyes sparkled. Her hair bounced about her shoulders as she tilted her head and shaded her eyes against the sun. Every day she told him the same things about how wonderful he was. He could never be sure just how much his saving her life had to do with it—he'd pulled her out a week ago—but he didn't really care. She embarrassed him with her open hero worship, but he liked it and he liked her.

He made his way down the ladder from the chair to the sand.

"How many's that for today?"

"How many what?"

"You know, silly. How many people did you save?"

"You mean how many did I help out of the water?"

"Come on, Danny, how many?"

"Only four. Look, Maggie, probably none of them would have drowned. I just keep them from getting tired out there."

"Yeah, sure." She got serious. "Danny? Is there something wrong with me?"

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"What do you mean?"

"Am I ugly or what? It's been a whole week. You haven't even asked me for my phone number."

"Well, we're not supposed to do that. Besides, how do you know I didn't look it up? I've got your name and address. Remember that card we filled out?"

"Why haven't you called then?"

"I've been busy. I'm shy too."

"You're fooling again, Danny. I don't have a phone. My father had it taken out."

"He sounds strict. What would he think of you talking to a strange boy on the beach?"

"You're *not* a strange boy—you saved my life. He wants to meet you, to thank you. How about it?"

"O.K. You doing anything tonight?"

She bit her lower lip excitedly. "No."

"Would you like to go to dinner and take in a movie?"

"Danny, I'd love to. Come by around six?"

Carl Matthews stepped into the office at four-thirty.

"Thanks for coming, Mr. Matthews." Andy shook his hand. "I'll try to make this as brief as possible."

Andy informed him of his constitutional rights and asked for his permission to tape the interview. Matthews insisted that he needed no attorney to be present. "I've nothing to hide. I don't need a lawyer to help me tell you the truth. I'm here to help you find the killer, not to figure out ways to prevent implicating myself. I suppose a lawyer would tell me not to say anything. We'd never get anywhere that way."

Andy admired the man's sincerity, but he'd seen a lot of innocent men become entangled in a bushel of trouble by not having an attorney with them. However, Andy wasn't going to press the point.

"I want you to start at the beginning, from the time you met Mrs. Matthews until—well, until now. Don't leave out anything. Tell me everything that comes into your mind."

Carl Matthews had known Eleanor for a year and a half. They had met at a party, fallen in love, and married two months later. She wasn't drinking then. She had tried to tell him that she'd once been an alcoholic, but he hadn't been able to believe her. She'd been married twice before.

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She wanted children badly, but neither of her first two husbands had been able to give her children. Matthews told Andy how she had started to drink after about a year, how he had realized when it was too late that she was turning to drink because of a feeling of inadequacy.

It was toward the end of the interview when Matthews said, "I really thought she had committed suicide when I found her in the bathroom. She spoke many times of trying it. In fact, I really think she was trying to kill herself, drown herself, in the ocean just a few weeks ago. The lifeguard got to her just in time. There was a heavy undertow—down at Playa del Rey. She—"

"Playa del Rey?"

"Yes, we went to the beach every chance we had."

Butterflies brushed their wings against the lining of Andy's stomach. Andy claimed he got butterflies in his stomach when the pieces begin to fit together. Some oldtimers claimed their feet itched, or their ears burned, or their mouths got dry, like a boxer when he's got that feeling the next punch is going to do it. This was one of the times.

Andy stood up.

"Mr. Matthews, I'm not going to keep you any longer. You've been very helpful."

"That's all you want to ask me?"

Andy had a good feeling about Matthews. "That's all for now. Just keep yourself available in case I need you."

"All right, I'll do that."

As soon as Matthews left, Andy dug out the files on the other bathtub cases. It was in the third case, the Johnson fellow, that he thought it had come up. He was right. He found it there in the interview with Johnson's wife. He read the transcription:

"Detective Ettinger: Is there anything else you can tell us?

Mrs. Johnson: It seems so funny that just a week ago, poor Leonard almost drowned in the ocean—right down at Playa del Rey—and now this in the—in his own bathroom."

It required seven phone calls and an hour for Andy to check out his hunch.

The pieces fit together. All five victims had been pulled from the surf at Playa del Rey during the past four months.

Andy dialed Stu's number. "I'm down at the office. Be here in fifteen minutes. We've got work to do."

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By the time Stu arrived Andy had arranged to meet Paul Langly, the captain of the Playa del Rey beach-guard crew, at Langly's office.

Langly was waiting for them when they got there. A husky redhead with freckles, Langly failed to understand why they wanted a list of all the beach guards who had worked Playa del Rey during the summer. When they told him what they had in mind, he came up with something better—the file of rescues. The guards must fill out a white card for each rescue, showing name, age, and address of the victim. There they were, all five names, and all with the same name at the bottom—Danny Gruen. Gruen lived in nearby El Segundo. They headed over there on the double.

A silver-haired woman answered their ring. Andy told her who they were. "We're looking for a Mr. Dan Gruen, ma'am."

"That's my son." Her eyes clouded. "Why are you—Danny hasn't done anything wrong. He's a good boy. He's *never* done anything wrong—"

"Is he home?"

"No, he's out on a date with a girl—a nice girl, he told me."

"Do you know the girl?"

"No, Danny didn't tell me her name. He doesn't always tell me who—"

Andy interrupted. "That's not important, Mrs. Gruen. This is an emergency. We'll have to search Danny's room."

"But I don't think you—" she started to object.

"Did your son bring a package home from work today?" Andy glanced at Stu and caught the look of puzzlement on his face.

"I don't know. I didn't see him come in."

"A clock—a small clock. It was left at your son's lifeguard station as a prank. It's really a bomb and we don't know when it's set to go off." Andy ignored Stu's cough. Sometimes you had to stretch the rules a little.

"Who would—"

"We don't have time to explain, Mrs. Gruen." Andy's tone was urgent. "Your son may have left it in his room. I think you'd better leave the house while we search for it."

"Are you sure—"

"Yes, ma'am. Some nutty kid at the beach was jealous because his girl kept flirting with your son." He turned to Stu. "It could blow any minute, Stu. You'd better help Mrs. Gruen outside. I'll have a look. No use both of us taking a chance."

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Stu nodded, and took a firm grip on the woman's arm. Andy waited until they were outside.

He found the boy's room. It was in good condition—for a college kid's room. The bed wasn't made, several men's magazines were scattered near the bed, pajamas were draped over a chair, pennants took up half the wall space. All in all, it looked like a normal, growing young man's pad. Andy looked under the mattress. He searched the closet. A pair of tennis shoes lay in the corner—they were damp. On the floor was a discarded cardboard container. Andy traced the outline of both shoes on the cardboard, folded it, and put it in his coat pocket. If he tried to walk out with the shoes, it might look phoney. Besides, without a search warrant, the shoes might not be admissible as evidence.

He found what he was looking for in the bottom drawer of the dresser, a small notebook with names in it, pages and pages of names. Most of the names had lines through them. Some had crosses. Andy recognized the five that had been crossed out.

Four names were still open. He took a deep breath as he tucked the book into his pocket.

He was about to leave when he remembered one more thing. He went to the bathroom. There was a hairbrush, the kind men use on short haircuts, on the basin. He picked several hairs from it and dropped them into a small envelope he always carried.

"Nothing in there," he told Mrs. Gruen and Stu when he got outside. "Your son has a car, hasn't he, ma'am?"

She told them what kind of a car her son owned and found the license number on a gas credit-card bill.

They told Mrs. Gruen not to worry about her son's safety, that they would be sure to find him before anything happened.

Back in the car, Stu wasn't so sure they had done the right thing. "You didn't have to do that. You scared the daylights out of her."

Andy handed him the little black book. "I had to save time. That girl is in trouble."

Andy radioed for a car to be sent to Danny's house while Stu looked through the names.

"I see what you mean. Looks like four names are still open, three of them women."

"Yeah" was all Andy said. He was thinking about that nice girl Danny Gruen's mother had been talking about.

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As they drove along Sepulveda the fog began to roll in from the ocean.

"Your folks are nice, Maggie." Danny meant it.

"Thank you. They like you too."

"How can you tell?"

"Oh, Papa didn't make a big deal about my deadline. When he doesn't like my date he makes a big deal about getting in by twelve-thirty."

"He watches you pretty close. Not many parents do these days."

"I don't mind." She smiled. "Papa's fair about it. Some girls' folks don't care what they do, where they go, who they go with. I don't think I'd like that."

Danny glanced at her. "How come so far away? Come on, scoot over so I don't have to yell."

"I thought you were shy." She slid over on the seat, moving closer to him without crowding him. "Where are we going to eat?"

"Like I told your father, Redondo Beach. You like fish, I hope."

"Love it."

Andy and Stu found phone numbers listed for two of the three women. Andy phoned one, Stu the other. Andy's was a Torrance woman, at home with her husband. Andy explained the situation to the man without going into detail and told him to keep his wife home until they heard from the police. The other gal was an S.C. coed. Stu talked to her father, who agreed to bring her home from her sorority house until things cleared up. The third girl, Maggie Randolph, wasn't listed in the phone book.

The two detectives headed for Maggie's house.

They got to the house an hour after the girl had left with "such a fine-looking young man," as Maggie's father put it. Andy figured there was no sense in overly alarming them. He told them they wanted Danny for questioning—routine questioning. "Did they say anything about their plans for the night?" Stu asked. "Where they were going?"

"We always know where our girl is going," Mr. Randolph answered. "They're going to have dinner in Redondo Beach, then they're going to see one of those Elvis movies."

"Did they say where for dinner?"

Mrs. Randolph volunteered, "No, but Danny said he knew a fine place for a fish dinner."

"How about the show?"

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They both shook their heads.

"I think we have enough to go on," Andy told Stu. They gave the Randolphs a number to use just as soon as their girl got home. They didn't tell them they would have a car sent to the house to wait.

By the time they reached the Redondo Beach city limits the fog was so thick they had slowed down to five to seven miles an hour. Storefronts were barely visible from the street.

"Fog picked a great night," Stu moaned.

"Yeah, it's going to be rough."

Maggie blotted her lips and set aside her napkin.

"Good?" Danny needn't have asked. Her plate was clean except for a few fish bones.

"Lousy. I only ate it to be polite," she answered, then laughed at the shocked expression on his face.

He smiled. Maggie had an infectious warmth that reached out to him. He'd been relieved a week ago when he'd decided, without a doubt, that she had a place on this earth. She'd been worth saving.

"Why did you wait so long, Danny, to ask me out? I had to flirt with you every day for a week. I almost died waiting."

"I don't go out much. Like I told you, I'm shy."

"Am I the first one you've rescued and taken out on a date?"

He hesitated before answering. "Yes, as a matter of fact."

She stared into his eyes. "It must be wonderful to be able to save lives."

"That's what I'm trained for."

"I mean, it must *feel* wonderful. I bet you've saved a hundred lives."

"In three summers, at least a hundred, I guess."

"Well, doesn't it make you feel— Oh, I don't know how to say it."

"It makes me feel like I'm doing my job. That's what they pay me for. I don't like to talk about it." This kind of talk made him nervous. He wanted to drop the subject.

The mild outburst had surprised her. She nodded without saying anything, and they finished their dessert quickly and in silence.

When they stepped outside he asked, "You sure you want to go to a movie?"

"Why? Do you want to take me home? I made you angry."

"No, of course not. You're the first person I've met in a long time that

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I can talk to. I'd just like to talk. There's something I've got to tell somebody. We could walk out on the pier."

"In this fog?"

"Sure, it's fun."

She hesitated only a moment. "O.K., let's go."

The pier was a couple of blocks from the restaurant. They left his car in the parking lot and started through the fog. She held onto his arm tightly. "Don't let go of me," she told him. "Boy, I've never seen it this thick."

A foghorn broke the air.

Maggie hesitated. "I'm scared."

"Of what? You're with me, what's there to be scared of?"

"It's just so weird not being able to see anything in front of your face."

The shops had closed early. They walked along one side of the pier with Danny guiding himself by the rail and Maggie walking on the inside. It was like being blind.

When they had been walking for five minutes Maggie said, "You wanted to tell me something."

"I don't know if I should."

"Why not? Is it something wrong?"

"No, I don't think so—not really wrong. That is, I'm not sure. I just have to tell someone." He stopped. "Can I trust you? Can I really trust you? You promise not to tell anyone?"

"Sure, I promise, Danny. What is it?"

He knew he could trust this girl. He could tell her everything.

Andy and Stu had made their plans in the Redondo Beach Police Station. Captain Josephson was anxious to help.

The town force had been alerted. Each car was assigned to check all restaurants in its cruising area. Andy figured if Danny had told the truth, the couple might still be in one of the local eating places. The first step was to check the parking lots for Danny's green car. The fog was so thick the lots had to be checked on foot. Squad cars moved around the city at five miles an hour.

Andy and Stu, unfamiliar with the area, had chosen the three-block section where most of the restaurants were concentrated. They moved on foot.

Near the end of the last block they found the car, in the parking lot

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of Otto's Grotto. They checked their guns and entered the seafood restaurant. Stu phoned the station to let them know where they were while Andy questioned the girl cashier. The place was empty.

"Yeah, I remember him. Tall, blond, good-looking. He had a sweet-looking girl with him. They left an hour ago."

"You sure?"

"They're the only customers we had tonight, Mac."

"His car's out in back."

The girl shrugged. "Maybe they went for a walk. Maybe they went out on the pier."

Stu heard the remark as he walked up. The two men exchanged glances as Andy said, "Out on the pier. Phone Josephson. Tell him to send some men to the pier. Tell him to alert the Coast Guard too. We might need them."

"Right." Stu nodded and hurried back to the phone.

"What's the quickest way to the pier?"

"Straight down the street one block, then over a block. You can't miss it—when it's not so foggy."

At the end of the deserted pier Danny was telling Maggie what had happened at the beginning of summer. "It was a week after I saved his life that I saw his picture in the papers, all over the front page. He'd picked up this little girl, just six years old. He told her that her mommy was hurt. Then he took her for a ride, strangled her, left the poor little thing out in the bushes."

"How could a man do that, Danny?"

"Not a man—a monster. I've seen things like that in the papers before, but this time it was different. Here was a man who was alive only because I'd saved his life. If I hadn't pulled him out of the ocean he would have drowned. He would have been dead. And that little girl would still be alive. That's all I could think about for weeks."

"You can't blame yourself for that. It's fate."

He felt good telling her about it. He knew he could trust her now. He could tell her everything. She'd understand.

"I thought a lot about that little girl. I'd stay awake at night. Was she really meant to die like that? Was that monster really meant to be saved so he could live long enough to do a terrible thing like that? Or should he have died? And I interfered!" His last words were harsh, angry. "I

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helped kill her. If it weren't for me she'd be alive now, and I was responsible."

"Danny, you—you can't do this."

"I have the picture." He took out his wallet and opened it for her. "I cut it out of the paper. Such a tiny, pretty thing, with big brown eyes and pigtails." The tears came to his eyes as he thought about it.

"He's going to the gas chamber, Danny."

"That's right, he's going to die—but he should have died in the ocean." A hardness entered his voice. "I've got a secret to tell you. It's about one of the fellows I work with. He thinks that maybe some of the people we save are meant to die—not all of them, but maybe some of them. So after he saves them he checks into their lives. He follows them. He finds out whether they were worth saving or not."

"I don't understand, Danny. What good does that do?"

Danny waited a moment. He looked her straight in the eyes, trying to predict her reaction. Then he told her, "He kills them."

"That's crazy! That's murder!"

"No, no, not murder." How could he explain it so she'd understand? "The ones he kills are the ones who should have died." Something was wrong. Why was she backing away from him? "He saved their lives. He has the right to take them away, destroy them."

"He told you all this?"

"Yes. Because I was the one who got him started, when I saved that madman's life. That's what started him to thinking."

"We have to tell the police. Danny, don't you see? He's as crazy as the man who killed the little girl."

"What?" He grabbed her by the shoulders. "Don't say that!"

"You're hurting me."

"Say he's not crazy!"

"Danny, stop!"

"Say it! Say he's not crazy!" He turned her around until her back was against the low wooden railing.

The fog cleared for a moment. Their eyes met and he knew now that nobody would ever understand. He'd been a fool to think she would. "You know, don't you?"

"No, Danny, no."

"You lie. You're going to tell the police about me."

"Gruen. Danny Gruen." At the sound of his name echoing through the

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fog he stopped and listened. Maggie opened her mouth to scream. He caught her as she took a deep breath and clamped his hand over her mouth, forcing her back over the railing.

"I swear I heard voices out there," Stu insisted.

"Me too." Andy squinted, tried to penetrate the fog. It was no use. You couldn't see your own hand in front of your face. The flashlights had turned out to be useless.

"Let's hold hands and make a human bridge across the pier," Stu said. "That way he won't slip past us."

"It's worth a try. O.K., boys, let's make like ring-around-the-rosie." Andy was at the right end of the line, using the railing as a guide. He could hear the waves crashing below as they advanced.

"Let's go easy. We're not sure it's our man. Besides, if it is, he has a girl with him."

They hadn't gone far when they heard a girl's frightened scream. They stopped.

One of the Redondo men said, "I think she was falling."

"Let's go, on the double," Andy ordered. They started to trot, still holding onto each other.

Somebody ran into Andy, head-on. He fell on his back, a heavy body on top of him, fingers working at his throat. His grip with Stu had been broken.

"Andy, you O.K.?" It was Stu, yelling almost into his ear.

Andy gurgled, thrashed out with his arms. The grip suddenly loosened and he felt the weight lifted from him.

"Andy, is this you? Talk, man!"

"I'm down here," Andy blurted out, rubbing his throat. He could faintly make out two outlines struggling, punching at each other, next to the railing. There was a loud grunt, then one figure disappeared.

"Stu?" Andy asked cautiously, taking his gun from its shoulder holster.

"It's me. I'm all right. Our friend is in the water. I think I got him in the throat. I doubt if he'll make it. He's—"

"Help! Help!" The girl's cries, barely loud enough to reach them, were weak.

"Come on," Andy shouted as he moved along the railing. "She's farther out."

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"Keep yelling so we can find you." Stu's deep voice carried through the fog.

They ran toward the voice, and stopped when it began to die away.

"We passed her." Andy turned and bumped into Stu. "Back up."

They walked, slowly, homing in on the voice.

"I think she's right below us now." Stu's voice was firm, confident. "I'm going in."

"Wait! You can't jump—you can't see anything down there."

Stu laughed nervously. "All the better—I'm chicken about heights. If you don't hear from me, keep talking to her."

Andy tried to grab his partner's arm as Stu climbed over the railing, but he was too late. Stu jumped into the fog and disappeared.

The Coast Guard made it in thirty minutes. Stu and Maggie had hugged a barnacle-laden piling. They were scratched, tired, and half frozen, but they were all right.

As the boat made its way to shore, Andy poured two cups of hot coffee and handed them to Stu and the girl, huddled under blankets. "Didn't anyone tell you we're supposed to be brains, not heroes?"

"No, sir," Stu answered innocently. "Nobody ever mentioned that, and it's not in the book. One of us had to go. I figured I had the best chance, so I just jumped."

Andy straightened up. "Hey, wait a minute. I'm not that old."

"I didn't mean it that way. I just meant that I figured I had enough hair on my head to keep my brain from freezing up in that cold water. But you, well—"

Andy laughed and slapped him on the back. "O.K., say no more, Tarzan."

The boat dropped the couple off and went back to search for Danny Gruen. They found him two hours later, floating face down. Andy assumed that Stu's karate blow had paralyzed the killer enough so that he hadn't been able to help himself after he hit the water. Andy wanted to believe he had drowned. It didn't help the other five, but it made a little sense.

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What Frightened You, Fred?

by Jack Ritchie

The warden shook his head sadly as he looked me over. "You're not real bright, Fred. You are out not even forty-eight hours and now we got you back with us again. It was hardly worth the trouble filling out your parole papers."

Dr. Cullen sat at one end of the warden's desk. He took off his heavy shell-rimmed glasses and polished them with a handkerchief. "How old are you, Fred?"

"Fifty-five, sir," I said.

Warden Bragan puffed his cigar. "Just plain stupid."

Dr. Cullen smiled slightly. "Perhaps not, warden." He turned back to me. "Did the big buildings frighten you, Fred? The people, the cars, and the loud noises?"

I wondered whether all psychiatrists wore bow ties and tweed jackets. Perhaps it was their uniform. "We had movies in here every Wednesday night, sir," I said. "I've seen big buildings and cars and people before."

"Ah," Dr. Cullen said. "But that's not the same as actually seeing them in real life, now is it, Fred?"

"No, sir," I said.

Dr. Cullen put the glasses back on his nose. "You've been in prison off and on for twenty-five years of your life?"

"I guess so, sir," I said. "If that's what the record shows."

Bragan grinned. "Well, anyway I'm glad to have you back, Fred. You're the best typist and file clerk I ever had."

"Thank you, sir," I said. I cleared my throat. "Will I have to put in any time in the laundry first?"

Bragan chewed on his cigar and thought about it. He was a big, heavy man, and he was going to run for governor. That's what the prison radio announced four days ago. It didn't mean anything to us in here, but I knew that some people outside wouldn't like Bragan to be governor.

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He decided to do me a favor. "I should say not," he said. "I need you in the office. As far as I'm concerned, you haven't been gone at all."

Bragan's eyes went over me again. "You'd think that some people would learn to behave on the outside. But I guess nobody can teach you. Not even with a hammer."

Dr. Cullen folded his hands. "In a sense you are right about Fred. But I believe there's more to his case than that." He turned to me. "What was it like outside? Was it cold?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I believe the temperature was around forty-five or even a little lower."

He smiled patiently. "That's not what I mean, Fred."

It had been gusty with the smell of winter hanging in the air when I walked out the pedestrian section of the big gates.

There wasn't anybody waiting for me in the graveled parking lot. I hadn't really expected anyone to be. I just had the small hope that Tony Wando might have remembered to send a car for old times' sake. He could have been keeping track of the time I spent inside the walls.

I made myself a cigarette and waited for the shuttle bus to come along.

The driver was only vaguely interested in me. He'd made pickups here before. At the railway station I bought a ticket and boarded the train.

When I got off two hours later, I passed up the taxi stands and walked. I had eighty-six dollars in my pocket, but that represented four years of sweat and I couldn't see spending any part of it for a ride. Not that money.

Big Mike Kowalski was in front of his place watching a delivery man wheel cases of beer into his bar. Mike had put on some weight since I'd seen him last, but he had the build that wasn't troubled by extra pounds.

I stopped next to him. "Hello, Mike."

He nodded and looked down at the suitcase. "You going someplace?"

"I've been, Mike," I said. "Four years."

He remembered. "That's right. Hardly noticed that you were gone."

I smiled. "People don't."

He stifled a yawn. "When did you get out?"

"Just now. A few hours ago, as a matter of fact."

He put the cigar back in his mouth. "Let's go inside and get warmed up. I'll set up a round for old times' sake."

I shook my head. "Can't do that, Mike. I'm on parole."

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He shrugged. "Can't see why anybody'd make a fuss about a few beers." His eyes went over me. "Did they get you a job?"

"I'm supposed to report to a warehouse on the north side Monday morning. It's office work, they tell me."

The wind swirled dust in the gutters and Mike shivered slightly behind his big white apron.

I changed the suitcase to my left hand. "I guess I'd better get going before you get pneumonia. I'll try to get a room in my old place. Let people know that I'm out, will you, Mike?"

He grinned. "Who'd want to know?" He asked that because he couldn't think of anybody right then and there.

"You never know, Mike," I said. "I could be important to somebody."

I began walking and after a while when it began to drizzle I turned up my coat collar.

I stopped in front of a small café and looked at the wall clock. Right about now we'd be filing into the big mess hall. It was Thursday and we'd be having beef stew, bread, and coffee.

I went inside the café. There was beef stew on the menu, but it didn't taste just right. Not so filling either, I thought.

"What did you do on the outside, Fred?" Dr. Cullen asked. "During those few hours?"

The warden snorted. "The fool got drunk and busted a tavern window."

"Yes, sir," I said. "That's what I did."

Dr. Cullen smiled. "Why didn't you run away after you did that, Fred? Why did you wait for the police to arrive?"

"I guess I had too much to drink, sir," I said. "I wasn't thinking clear."

Bragan showed large uneven teeth. "You sure weren't. You violated your parole and that's going to cost you another two years."

"Fourteen months, sir," I said respectfully.

Dr. Cullen consulted the papers on his lap. "You don't have any living relatives, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Did you get any mail while you were in here? Or write to anyone?"

"No, sir."

"Do you have any close friends on the outside? People you could go to?"

"No, sir."

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He leaned forward. "But you do have friends here in this prison, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I think I have a few."

He sat back, satisfied. "You were in trouble here only once. Isn't that right, Fred?"

"I don't remember, sir."

Bragan laughed. "He got caught in a shakedown inspection a couple of years ago. We found a knife in his mattress." He looked at me. "What would you want with a knife, Fred?"

It was the one I was going to use on Ed Reilly, for the way he shoved me around in the yard. But Ed had more enemies than me and somebody else got to him while I was in solitary.

"I don't really remember, sir," I said.

Dr. Cullen made a bridge with the tips of his fingers. "Fred came back here not because he was careless or stupid. He wanted to be back."

Bragan grinned, waiting for more.

"It's quite common, Warden," Dr. Cullen said. "Especially with those men who've spent a large portion of their lives in prison. It's called institutionalization. These men are actually ill-at-ease and even frightened by the outside world."

Bragan didn't go along with that. "Don't give me that malarky. Nobody likes to be told when to get up and when to go to bed, what to wear and when and how to wear it, when to eat, when to work, and when to stop. Isn't that right, Fred?"

I thought he had done a good job of describing the lives of almost anybody, inside or out. "I'm afraid I don't understand, sir," I said.

Dr. Cullen was patient. "Freedom means responsibility. It means decision and worry. That's why so many people actually reject it—without consciously knowing they're rejecting it, of course."

"Yes, sir," I said. "The whole world's a prison."

There was a trace of annoyance in the doctor's voice. "I am referring specifically to this place."

"Yes, sir," I said.

Bragan laughed. "You're up the wrong creek, Doc. Fred can't stand this place any more than I can."

Dr. Cullen became slightly stiff. "I know what I am speaking about. I have had training for my job, Mr. Bragan."

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Bragan grinned. "Meaning that I haven't? I'm just a political appointee?"

Dr. Cullen said nothing.

Bragan kept grinning. "I don't need any training. This job is just a stepping stone for me. I've been here five years and I feel like I've been serving time myself."

Dr. Cullen turned to me. "The world outside must be a lonely place for you. Isn't that right, Fred?"

I didn't know exactly why I wanted to go back to my old rooming house. Maybe it was just because it was one of the few places where I was remembered.

Mrs. Carr answered the doorbell. She was a massive woman with suspicion permanent in her watery blue eyes.

"It's me," I said. "Remember? Fred Riordan."

She squinted until recognition came.

"I'd like a room," I said. "My old one, if that's vacant?"

Her voice was cold. "I don't have no rooms left."

I smiled. "That's not what the sign in the window says."

She stood immovable, a silhouette against the dim lights of the hallway.

"I've never made any trouble for you," I said. "I'll pay in advance. Two weeks."

She hesitated.

"I'm on parole," I said. "I have to be good."

She made up her mind. "Fourteen dollars."

I followed her up the balustraded stairway. The railing was damp with furniture oil. "Is Jake Miller still here?"

She stopped in front of my old room. "He died a couple of years ago. Nobody's here now that you'd know."

She opened the door of my room. Inside was the remembered bareness. A brass bedstead, a chest of drawers, a plain wooden chair. There'd probably be a half dozen wire hangers in the closet.

"No smoking in bed," Mrs. Carr said. "And I don't want trouble of any kind." Her eyes went over me. "You don't look too bad. Older, but well fed and rested."

"People live longer in prisons," I said. "It's the regular hours that do it."

When she was gone, I opened the paper-lined drawers of the chest

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until I found an ashtray. I sat on the bed and smoked a cigarette. When I was through I turned off the overhead light. I took off my shoes and lay down on the bed.

After a while the cold began to seep into my bones. The cold was something I'd forgotten. I'd have to get used to it again.

I pulled the quilt up to my chin.

I listened to the footsteps of the other roomers as they came up the creaking stairs and I heard the closing and opening of doors and the voices of strangers.

After a few hours there was nothing but the occasional hiss of auto tires on the wet streets down below.

There were no hundred men making their individual sleep-sounds. There were no echo-tinged footsteps of the guards walking the tiers.

"People get into habits of living," Dr. Cullen said. "When their routine is disturbed they become confused. They are lost."

I thought I could use a cigarette, but I knew that the warden wouldn't let me smoke one here. "Yes, sir," I said. "The bookkeeper looks forward to retirement all his life, but when it comes he doesn't know what to do with himself. He's unhappy."

Dr. Cullen forced a smile. "I'm afraid you still don't understand, Fred." He rubbed his temples. "What were you sent up here for, Fred?"

It was all there in the papers on his lap. "For armed robbery, sir."

Bragan lolled in his swivel chair. "Fred held up a filing station. He was picked up less than a half hour later. He don't seem to have much luck with his jobs."

Dr. Cullen tamped the record sheets to neat squareness and put them back into the folder. "He doesn't really want luck, Warden. He may not even realize it consciously, but this is his home. Here are the only friends he knows. Here it is warm. Here all his decisions are made for him. He has a bed and food and the work isn't too hard. He has absolutely nothing to worry about."

Bragan waited for the door to close behind the doctor and then turned to me. He grinned. "You're back here because you're plain stupid. Isn't that right, Fred?"

Mrs. Carr knocked at my door at noon the next day. "Telephone for you."

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I went downstairs to the wall phone. It was Tony Wando and he wanted to see me right away, on the double.

Tony's high-ceilinged apartment was on the top floor of the Sheldon Building and he could look down at and down *on* the city he almost owned.

He mixed two drinks and handed one to me. "What's the matter, Fred? You like the big house?"

"No," I said. "I sweat when I even think about it."

He smiled slightly. "Then why did you keep fooling around with the little things, Fred? Filling stations, delicatessens, drugstores. You always got caught."

I sipped my drink. "You paid me good when I worked, Tony, but I got a job from you maybe once every two or three years. I couldn't live on that."

He thought it over and shrugged. "I guess you're right. I don't have much of your kind of business."

He finished his drink and then he told me what he wanted me to do.

I wiped my forehead with a handkerchief. "I don't want it, Tony. Get somebody else."

He shook his head. "This has got to look natural. Like one of the things that just happen when a man has a job like he has. If there's any smell that it's a syndicate killing we'll be knee-deep in investigations."

He stopped pacing. "You're perfect for the setup, Fred. You'll be near him and you can find the right time. You're good with a knife, Fred, and you can make it look like any one of a thousand could have done it."

He came closer. "It's got to be done. He's getting independent ideas, Fred. He don't wait until I tell him any more. He talks back. If he ever gets in the state capital he'll make his own organization." Tony's eyes were dark. "I can't have that, Fred. Bragan was nothing when I picked him up, but now he's biting my hand."

He watched me. "I know that it means another fourteen months back there for you, but you'll get a thousand for every month. It's that important to me."

After I left Tony, I went out and got drunk. Then I smashed a tavern window and waited for the cops to pick me up.

I had a job to do inside the walls.

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Loyalty

by Patrick O'Keeffe

Two hours after turning in at midnight, Parke was still tossing, sleepless, in his bunk. The wooden bulkhead between his cabin and the next one resounded to snoring on the other side. The heat evidently wasn't keeping the chief mate awake, Parke realized enviously.

It wasn't really the oppressive heat of the tropical night that was denying him sleep though. It was another fit of the blues, Parke told himself morosely. He simply couldn't shake them off. It wasn't easy to forget that only a few months ago he was chief mate of a modern supertanker, due for a command of his own within a year, all before he was thirty. Now he was down on the bottom rung again, third mate of an aging, chartered Honduran-flag freighter, barred from American ships as a loyalty risk.

Parke swung his long, lean legs over the edge of the bunk, groped with his toes in the darkness for his straw sandals, and lowered himself into them. A turn or two around the deck might get him out of his self-pitying mood and bring on sleep. He hooked back his cabin door and started along the passageway in his shorts. The second mate's door was open, the cabin lights on, but the second mate, who had the deck watch, wasn't inside. Probably up on the bridge making log entries, mused Parke.

He stepped out over the high doorsill to the darkened boat deck and blinked around. There was no sign of the sailor on gangway watch either. Most likely he'd slipped down to the crew mess for coffee. The air was stagnant, and the fully laden *Mirmar* lay as if in a torpor, her forepart illuminated feebly by a distant lamp on the long wooden pier of the little Central American port of Truxillo.

Parke strolled aft, his sandals like cat paws on the deck planking. As he approached the rails overlooking the well deck, he froze to a halt. The offshore side of the ship was in deep shadow. There was no moon, but in the weak light from a few scattered stars he could see the form of a man clambering over the bulwark, near the stern. The intruder apparently

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had shinnied up a rope from a small boat. He was helped inboard by another shadowy figure and led to a nearby hold ventilator mounted on a high base. The intruder scrambled up the handgrips and dropped down inside the cavernous cowl onto the bags of coffee below.

A second man was meanwhile squirming over the bulwark. He was guided to the ventilator and vanished into the cowl. The man on deck then untied the rope from a bulwark cleat and let it drop into the unseen boat below. He started toward the midship accommodation, glancing cautiously around and upward at the boat deck, but failing to see Parke merged into the dark background of the superstructure. As the man stepped through the lighted doorway into the passageway below, Parke darted to the rails and caught a glimpse of his face. It was Budvic, the ginger-haired purser.

This, Parke decided grimly, was only the purser's first voyage in the *Mirmar* and already he was in business smuggling aliens. Parke wondered if the smuggling was connected in any way with Budvic's manner of joining the ship. Captain Mendoza had fired the previous purser at short notice and Budvic had happened to be on hand to step into the job. Parke recalled the chilly brushoff Budvic had given him when he'd remarked that he'd met Budvic somewhere before, only to be told that he must be mistaken. It now looked as if Budvic hadn't wanted to be recognized.

Parke hesitated, undecided whether to find the second mate and report the stowaways to him as the officer of the watch, or waken the captain. He started as a form glided out from beside a lifeboat.

"Mr. Parke, please come along to my cabin."

Parke was dumfounded. Captain Mendoza! The captain had actually been watching the stowaways smuggled aboard!

In silence Parke returned along the deck behind the captain and into his cabin. Captain Mendoza closed the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Parke," he said bleakly, gesturing at the cushioned settee to one side of the door. The captain sank into the swivel armchair before his desk, swinging it around to face the third mate. Captain Mendoza, a slight brown-skinned man in his fifties, with stern features and greying dark hair brushed back, wore soft slippers and thin pajama trousers, his bare upper torso damp with perspiration.

The captain stared unhappily at the carpet, and for several moments the only sound was the hum of the oscillating fan mounted between the two mosquito-screened portholes. This was only Parke's third voyage in

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the *Mirmar* and he knew little of Captain Mendoza beyond that he was an exiled Cuban who had served his cadetship in American vessels.

"Last time we were here loading in Truxillo," Captain Mendoza said in precise but accented English, "a compatriot of mine came aboard to see me. He said that I had displayed unfriendliness toward the Castro government by not returning to Cuba and serving in Cuban vessels. He said that my daughter, Carmela, had displayed similar unfriendliness and had been caught taking part in counterrevolutionary activities. She had been arrested. The evidence against her was irrefutable. There was little doubt that she would be found guilty and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. However, if the People's Prosecutor could cite any extenuating circumstance—"

Captain Mendoza looked up at Parke derisively. "From what you just saw, you can guess the extenuating circumstance he had in mind. I told him that the master of a ship is in no position to hide and feed stowaways. He replied that I would be given an assistant. I made every possible objection, pointed out every risk and weakness in the scheme. I was wasting my breath. The man said that when I reached New York and I heard from my daughter, I would find that I could overcome all obstacles.

"There was a letter awaiting me from Carmela. She wrote that she had been arrested with other counterrevolutionaries. She had confessed. She begged me to help her." The captain glanced mournfully at a photograph framed in silver on the glass-topped desk. "Carmela is all I have since her mother died several years ago. She waited too long after Castro came into power to leave Cuba. She is a doctor and, as such, is not allowed to leave."

The captain looked intensely at Parke as if for understanding. "The fear that Carmela might be imprisoned in a Havana dungeon, and surely die there, was agony. I finally yielded. It was Budvic who had brought the letter aboard. Previous letters from Carmela had come by airmail. Budvic said this one came through secret channels. He was ready to sign on as purser. I trumped up some excuse for discharging my regular purser.

"This afternoon Budvic deliberately fouled up the sailing papers after the coffee was loaded, to hold the ship in port so the stowaways could be got aboard during the night. I stayed awake. Budvic watched for the boat and let me know when it was alongside. I went out and told the second mate I couldn't sleep and sent him down to the galley to make me some cocoa. I told the sailor on gangway watch to go up to the fo'c'sle head and

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check the mooring lines. That got the two of them out of the way. I was sure you were fast asleep, like the chief mate."

Parke shook his head. "I was wide awake—the heat, maybe. I finally turned out and took a walk along the deck. Captain Mendoza," went on Parke regretfully, "I'm most sorry about your daughter. I realize how worried you must be. But I can't go along with you in what you're doing. For one thing, those two stowaways can't be anything but Castro agents; that alone would be enough, but if they're caught it would go pretty bad for me, with my reputation. You can understand that."

Captain Mendoza nodded. During his first voyage in the *Mirmar*, Parke had confided in the captain all about Clarice; how he, a lonesome merchant-marine officer, had been smitten by her on a plane between New York and Mobile, unaware that she was leftist inclined. He'd been pleased when she took up the study of political economy and sociology to fill in her time during his absences on long voyages; he'd naturally approved of her taking part in civil-rights demonstrations and he'd joined her in a few of them, though he found them pretty radical. When his ship had gone on the Vietnam run, he'd regarded her curiosity about the ship's cargo and movements as mere wifely interest. He'd been stunned to hear over the radio at sea that she was one of the extremists blown up in an attempt to bomb a Federal courthouse. By that time the F.B.I. had marked him as a loyalty risk, and right after that Vietnam ammunition ship was hijacked the Coast Guard canceled his validation, barring him from serving on American ships.

"But Mr. Parke," the captain said anxiously, "don't misjudge me. I did not tell you about my daughter to get your sympathy and ask for silence. Not at all. I wanted you to know what pressure I was under to have risked going so far. I only appeared to yield to the blackmail. The stowaways are to be smuggled ashore by boat, late, during the first night at the dock in New York. Immediately after the ship has tied up I intend to contact the F.B.I. secretly."

"But your daughter?" queried Parke.

"The agreement is that I see to getting the stowaways aboard unseen, do everything within my power to prevent them from being discovered at sea or when being smuggled ashore. What happens to them after that is beyond my control. I shall ask the F.B.I. to cooperate by making it appear that the stowaways had been discovered by chance after they had slipped ashore.

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"What I fear, though, is that I may not be given an opportunity to contact the F.B.I. secretly, even by telephone. Budvic is watching me, even censoring my radio messages. I could easily tip off the immigration inspectors at quarantine station, but they might not be as willing or able as the F.B.I. to cooperate, and would seize the stowaways. Now, thanks to you, if you'll be willing to go along with me, I won't have to worry about that. You will be above suspicion. You could go to the F.B.I. in my place."

Captain Mendoza eyed Parke beseechingly. Parke frowned.

"If the stowaways are discovered during the voyage," Parke replied, "I'd come under suspicion by the F.B.I. if they're recognized as Castro agents."

"I pray they won't be discovered," said Captain Mendoza fervently. "Unless they were seized as Castro agents they would be returned in this ship to Truxillo as ordinary stowaways, and I would have to make another attempt. If they were seized," added the captain reproachfully, "do you not think you could depend on me to swear that you could not possibly have aided them to stow away?"

As Parke hesitated, Captain Mendoza continued persuasively. "If you play safe and force me to put the stowaways back ashore, you will be giving them a chance to make another attempt by some other route or ship. If they remain on board, their capture is assured. By informing on what are possibly two important Castro agents, you will be proving your loyalty beyond all doubt, with all that it means—your old job, an early command. Most of all, to me at least, you will be doing a humane act on behalf of my daughter."

Parke's eyes went to the silver-framed photograph. Carmela Mendoza appeared to be around thirty, with the captain's dark hair, but gentle-looking and frail. He couldn't imagine her surviving long in a Havana dungeon. He'd hate to have that on his conscience.

There was a knock on the door. The captain glanced apprehensively at Parke, then called out cautiously, "Who's that?"

"Second mate, Cap'n. Your cocoa."

"Come in."

The bushy-mustached second mate entered with a mug of steaming cocoa. He stared at the lanky, half-naked third mate, obviously surprised at finding him in the captain's cabin at that hour. He set the mug on the desk and went out again, with a nod at Parke.

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"For a moment," said Captain Mendoza, "I thought it was Budvic coming up for something. I'd forgotten the cocoa. If Budvic saw you in here he'd be suspicious."

Parke rose. "In case the second mate gossips, I'll let it be known I couldn't sleep for a splitting headache. I heard you moving around in your cabin, so I came in for a few aspirins from the medicine chest. You kept me chatting."

"Then you will go along with me?" cried the captain joyously.

Parke nodded. "I only hope the F.B.I. will go along with you too."

"I am quite sure they will. Mr. Parke, I will never be able to thank you enough for—"

Parke, already opening the door, gestured with his other hand to show his embarrassment at being thanked.

The *Mirmar* sailed during the forenoon, after the vice-consul and the local port officials had accepted her papers and granted clearance. The weather was favorable, and the radio forecasts for the areas ahead were promising. Parke estimated that if they held, the ship would reach Ambrose Light around noon on the sixth day.

He awoke next morning with the anxious hope that Budvic hadn't been seen passing food and water down the ventilator during the night. According to Captain Mendoza, the purser was to provision the stowaways around two o'clock every morning, when the hands coming off deck and engine watches at midnight would have long since turned in; the day men, who usually gathered at the stern of an evening to smoke and chat, were generally asleep in their bunks by midnight. There were no crew quarters in the stern.

Parke was now doubly anxious that the stowaways go undiscovered, for it had belatedly occurred to him that if they were found during the voyage and not recognized as Castro agents by the immigration inspectors, he would be acting disloyally by remaining silent while they were returned to Truxillo, for a possible second attempt. If he spoke up, could he depend on Captain Mendoza not to turn against him in spite for having denied him a second chance to save his daughter? It was too late to think about that now, Parke decided ruefully.

Another thing that troubled Parke was a change in the purser's manner. Budvic now appeared to be less chilly toward him, even greeting him with a pleasant smile. It seemed suspicious that the purser should have

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adopted this new attitude right after the stowaways were brought aboard. Parke mentioned it to Captain Mendoza one forenoon on the bridge.

"I wonder if he spotted me on the boat deck the other night and he's conditioning me for some kind of ploy."

"Nonsense!" snapped Captain Mendoza. "He would have told me if he had seen you. He is probably feeling friendlier toward everybody now that the stowaways are aboard. It must be a relief to him. You can depend on it: he will be in trouble with his superiors if anything goes wrong. It has gone wrong, but he does not know it yet."

"He may not be telling you everything. Also, I'm sure I've seen that red head of his somewhere before, and he knows it too."

"You no doubt sailed with him on some other ship and it's slipped from his memory too. He told me he used to sail as a supercargo."

"I don't think it was on a ship I met him. I have a feeling it was somewhere ashore."

"Stop worrying about it," snapped the captain impatiently. "The F.B.I. will find out for you."

Parke was silent. He resented the captain's manner. He was no longer the anxious father pleading for his daughter, but a stern captain curtly rejecting the misgivings of a subordinate. Parke now feared that any gratitude Captain Mendoza might feel toward him would be short-lived, might not be anything to depend on if the chips were down. Parke felt desolate.

The *Mirmar* arrived at New York quarantine station with the stowaways still in hiding. As the immigration inspectors returned ashore Parke was uneasy over not having informed them about the stowaways, knowing it would go hard against him if they were found before he got to the F.B.I.

Captain Mendoza had regulated the ship's speed northward to ensure that she wouldn't dock at her East River pier until late in the afternoon, too late for the longshoremen to begin discharging the coffee cargo and perhaps discover the stowaways. By six o'clock the chief and second mates and most of the crew had gone ashore, leaving a shore night mate to keep the deck watch.

Parke had washed and shaved and changed from uniform khakis into a light summer suit and was ready to go to F.B.I. headquarters when Captain Mendoza burst into his cabin and shut the door. His swept-back hair was now in disarray, as if he had been tearing at it.

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"Budvic tricked us," he moaned. "The stowaways are already ashore. He knew you intended to go to the F.B.I."

Parke stared at him in dismay. "How did he find out?"

"He saw you follow me into my cabin the night the stowaways came aboard. He went around to my portholes and listened. He risked getting the stowaways out of the hold during the night, hiding them in his storeroom, and outfitting them from the crew slopchest. He gave them crew passes with my signature forged. They slipped ashore while the hands were down at supper."

"When did he tell you this?"

"A few minutes ago—just before he cleared out himself."

"There's perhaps time for the F.B.I. to catch up with him and the stowaways before they get far. I'll phone from the pier right away." Parke stopped. "Captain Mendoza," he said gently, "I'm sorry about your daughter."

"You can still help me to save her. Budvic said he had been advised to tell me that though I had meant to break the agreement, my daughter would be released, even allowed to leave the island, if you agree not to inform the F.B.I."

Parke was almost speechless. "And you expect me not to?"

"What good will it do now?" asked the captain. "They'll never catch them now."

"Then why are the Castroites so anxious to keep me from going to the F.B.I.?"

"They're afraid of what an investigation might uncover."

"Then that's what they're going to get. I'm sorry, Captain Mendoza, I can no longer stay silent."

The captain's eyes blazed. "If you cannot act humanely for my daughter's sake," he said in sudden vehemence, "then do it for your own. If Budvic is caught he will swear that you were a partner with him and me in the smuggling."

Parke was stunned. "And you'd lie with him?"

"I will do anything to save my daughter."

"So that's the kind of thanks I get!" raged Parke. "I was a fool to have listened to you. I see now why Budvic changed toward me. It was his way of laughing up his sleeve. But I'm going to have the last laugh. The F.B.I. won't swallow the accusation. They'll think it strange I should inform on myself."

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"Do you think Budvic and those behind him did not foresee that? You are dealing with clever men. Budvic told me to warn you that nothing has been overlooked. For your own good, do not telephone the F.B.I. Forget about proving your loyalty. It will land you in jail."

"Act like a traitor?" fumed Parke. "Keep my mouth shut while two spies slip into the country? You're talking to the wrong man. This isn't a time for proving loyalty. It's a time for practicing it, and that's what I'm going to do. I'll take my chances against you and Budvic."

Parke snatched open a drawer, gathered up a few coins, and started for the door.

As he went out, Captain Mendoza called after him.

"You are making a big mistake. Stop and think it over."

Parke disdained to reply. He hurried down the gangway and started up the deserted pier. About halfway along it, he turned into a dust-covered telephone booth and swiveled up one of the directories on the stand.

He looked up with a start as two men suddenly appeared from behind some tall packing cases. One was heavyset and looked like a longshoreman; the other was Budvic, still in ship khakis.

So this was something that hadn't been overlooked, Parke decided grimly; a trap he would walk into lindly if threats failed. He was cornered. The pier watchman and the customs guard were out of sight and hearing up in the little office by the pier gates.

Budvic smiled. "If it's the F.B.I. you're going to call—"

"And if I am?" challenged Parke defiantly.

He tensed as Budvic's companion thrust a hand inside his jacket. The man drew out not a knife or a gun but something he held out to Parke to read in the dim pier light.

"I can save you a dime. If you have any doubts, I'll give you the number to call."

As Parke stared dumbly at the identification, Budvic chuckled.

"You really did see this red head of mine before—at those demonstrations you took part in with your late wife."

"So that's where it was!" exclaimed Parke. He scowled. "It was you who got me blacklisted."

"I felt better about you after Captain Mendoza told me you intended to inform on the stowaways and—"

Parke stared. "Captain Mendoza told you?"

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Budvic smiled. "I didn't listen at his portholes. I got it from him. He led you to believe the stowaways were to be smuggled ashore by boat instead of through the gates as crew members, as planned, to make you think you would have lots of time for tipping off the F.B.I. He hoped to scare you into silence by warning you I'd implicate you in the smuggling. He didn't succeed, so now we have to keep you from fouling things up."

"Me?" exclaimed Parke.

Budvic grinned.

"You nearly fouled them up the night the stowaways came aboard. If you hadn't gone along with Captain Mendoza, he'd have slugged you and called me in to help dump the corpse overboard. That really would have put me on the spot. I had to talk him out of making you, in effect, walk the plank at sea."

"Murder to save his daughter?" queried Parke incredulously.

"Daughter nothing! That photo is of his niece. She's secretary to a government official in Santiago. Captain Mendoza himself is secretly pro-Castro."

Parke looked bewildered.

"If I ever manage to figure all this out—"

"Mr. Budvic," explained the purser's companion, "is one of the Bureau's undercover informers. He infiltrated a red group which was inciting civil-rights demonstrators to violence. When the Castroites got the promise of assistance from Captain Mendoza, they inquired around for someone with sea experience to aid him. Comrade Budvic was tapped for the assignment.

"They wanted the two agents smuggled in by sea for fear they might be detected if they tried to enter as refugees. When Mr. Budvic informed the Bureau of the plan, it was decided to let them land and then keep them under surveillance in the hope they'd lead to other Castro agents. Unfortunately, we reckoned without you."

"Which," said Budvic, "is why you're being confided in. If Captain Mendoza had scared you into silence, it wouldn't have been necessary. He knows you went out to phone the F.B.I. He'll be waiting for agents to show up. He's all set to deny all knowledge of the stowaways, with me backing him up. He'll make it sound like a wild yarn you thought up to prove your loyalty. The Bureau isn't ready to take action against him yet, but if there's no immediate inquiry tonight, he'll be suspicious.

"So," concluded Budvic, smiling, "the situation is reversed. You're

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being asked to cooperate with the F.B.I. instead of the other way around. We want you to go back and tell Captain Mendoza you thought better of it on the way up to the telephone."

"Go back and eat all I said to him? Go back and let that lying Commie think I'm a-a—" spluttered Parke.

"It's tough, as I should know." Budvic smiled. "But to a loyal-minded citizen—"

Parke breathed loud and hard. "You *would* have to put it that way!"

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A Place To Visit

by Stephen Marlowe

The sign outside, in big white letters, said PEPE'S. That much, in keeping with the geography, was Spanish, but the rest of the place was Greenwich Village with maybe a little Soho thrown in.

The canned music, as I opened the door and entered the dim interior, was a beatnik caterwaul. The waiters all wore tight white duck trousers, scarlet shirts tied at the waist, and peroxided hair. A drunk in the corner, wearing a Hemingway beard, a baseball cap, and a pair of steel-rimmed glasses low on the bridge of his nose, was shouting something about a bullfighter. Three limp-wristed types at the bar were discussing the war in Vietnam in disparaging terms. A girl, not quite drunk, sat on the end stool fiddling with a pair of castanets and saying "Olé" over and over again without spirit.

She wasn't the girl I was looking for. Nobody paid any attention to her, or to me, Chester Drum, until I hoisted myself up on a stool and said, "Pepe."

"Not here," one of the peroxide boys told me. "You're drinking?"

"Beer."

"One cerveza coming up."

He plunked the bottle and a glass down in front of me and a chit that said I owed Pepe sixty pesetas, muchas gracias. Sixty pesetas is a dollar. Pepe is the diminutive of José, which is Joseph in Spanish. The girl I was looking for was living here in Torremolinos, in the south of Spain, with an American expatriate named Joe Cummings.

I said, "Señor Cummings charges a lot of dough for a bottle of beer."

The peroxide boy shrugged. "You can always do your drinking elsewhere, amigo. We got class. You pay for class."

"Simply so *awful* I hardly knew what to *say*," one of the limp-wristed set whined.

"Madman with a cape," pontificated the man with the Hemingway

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beard, "but did anyone ever see him do a single decent *natural* to the left?" He was talking to himself.

The girl at the end of the bar went on clicking her castanets.

A bad Spanish imitation of the Beatles took over on the canned music.

I finished my beer. "When do you expect him?"

"Pepe?"

"Pepe," I said.

"He comes and he goes."

"I'll wait," I said.

Waiting earned me another beer and another one of Pepe's IOU's. It was swell beer.

An old man wearing one of those electric-blue work jackets you see all over Spain, a pair of dirty white ducks, and a beret came by, sweeping the floor with a twig-broom. He was dark enough to be a gypsy and he was the only Spaniard in the joint.

The door opened and a guy wearing the red-and-white team colors strolled in. He was big and his blond hair was no peroxide job. He had wide-spaced, mean-looking eyes and a complexion as pink and soft as a baby's bottom. Still he managed to look tough.

He slapped the old man's back. "Glad to see you're minding the store, partner," he said in English, and laughed, and went around to the business side of the bar.

"No comprendo," the old man said contemptuously.

The big blond guy moved down the bar to where the girl sat alone with her castanets. "You're drunk, Fran," he said. "I told you not to hang around here when you're drunk."

"I had a few," she protested.

"I say you're drunk. The Guardia could lift my license on me."

"I am not drunk."

"Beat it," he told her.

She stared at him with inebriated defiance.

"Drinks are on me," he said with a small smile, picking up her chits and tearing them in half. "Now blow."

"Well, in that case," she said, and lurched toward the door and through it. The three limp-wristed types snickered.

The peroxide boy whispered something to the big blond guy and he came over to me. "You wanted something special?"

"Pepe? Joe Cummings?"

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"So?"

"Joyce Addams," I said quietly.

"Never heard of her." The wide-spaced eyes narrowed.

"You got together in San Sebastián a couple of months ago," I said slowly. "You stayed at the Hotel Plaza in Madrid for the Festival of San Isidro. You drove down here by way of Granada, and she's been here ever since."

"Sorry, wrong number," Joe Cummings said.

"Her father hired me to bring her back to Geneva, no questions asked," I said. "She goes to the university there."

He laughed. "Been cutting a lot of classes, hasn't she?"

"No questions asked," I repeated.

"Better check with the operator," he said. "Or, hey, have you thought of the Yellow Pages? They're full of dames who want a free ride in the south of Spain or the south of anywhere."

The three limp-wristed types, who had been listening, snickered again.

"This is the part that hurts," I said, "because ordinarily I wouldn't do it this way. I've got a blank check of her old man's in my pocket. It's yours, filled in with a reasonable figure, if she drives back with me tonight, and that's the end of it."

"What's a reasonable figure?" he asked, now showing some interest.

"I thought you never heard of her."

"I'm just curious."

"It could go as high as a grand," I said. My client, who was loaded, worked for an American government agency in Geneva, had his eye on a big political appointment, and couldn't afford adverse publicity, had told me I could go as high as five thousand.

"O.K. I heard your pitch. I don't know your pigeon. Now get lost."

"You're making a mistake," I said.

"I'll take it up with my tax accountant."

He didn't offer to pay for my drinks. I paid and went out the door into the plaza that was lighted as bright as day. If he wanted to do it the hard way I'd go along with him. Torremolinos had grown from a fishing village to a jet-set watering place, but that still didn't make it any big city. I decided I could find Joyce Addams without any help from the guy she was keeping house for, but I didn't like it. Her old man had insisted on no fuss and no publicity. Well, she was his daughter.

"Señor."

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I turned around. The old Spaniard who had been sweeping the floor of Pepe's was behind me.

"You will continue to walk," he said. "Turn at the first street to the right. It is dark. Then we can talk."

I followed his instructions. The street was dark, all right. It smelled of charcoal, garlic, and the sea. I heard the old man's shuffling footsteps. "The señorita," he said in Spanish, "every day she cries. She wishes to go home."

"Then why doesn't she?"

"He will not allow it."

"Where is she?"

The old man said nothing.

I sighed. "All right, how much?"

The old man spat on the pavement. "Nada. For nada, señor. I only wish to know that you are the man who can do it."

I saw no way I could establish that fact. "Her father thought so," I said. "He sent me over a thousand kilometers to find her."

"A thousand kilometers," the old man said musingly, and I realized I had said exactly the right thing. "It is like the other end of the world. He must have much faith in you."

"Where can I find his daughter?"

The old man's thoughts were elsewhere. "His partner," he said. "I am his partner. It must be so as no foreigner can commence a business in Spain otherwise. But he treats me like dirt. You have seen? And of course the money all goes to him. Yet should the Guardia Civil learn of his various enterprises, señor, I too would be punished."

"Where is she?"

"That also is her problem. She knows, so he cannot let her go. Sooner would he kill her. That is clear, señor. Every day she cries. Every night."

I said nothing.

He walked away from me and then came back. A match flared and he was smoking. "A thousand kilometers," he said. "The father must have great faith in you. You are norteamericano also?"

I said I was an American.

He let out a long breath. "In the old days, before this of the *bodega* called Pepe's, I worked as a gardener in my village of Churriana, in the mountains. The Americans who stayed there were always good to me. Sí,

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sí, they were. It meant much to me. But the one who calls himself Pepe, he is an abomination."

"Then help me," I said.

He was going to, of course, or he wouldn't have followed me, but he had to wait for anger to trigger courage. I waited with him. Finally he said, "With the gypsies. On the beach. You walk down the Calle San Miguel to the mill tower, and follow the steps down to the water. There you will see caves where the gypsies live. Ask for the *gitano* named Rafael. And you understand as well that we never spoke?"

I said I understood.

"Then *vaya con dios*, hombre."

His footsteps shuffled away. He was gone.

Caves pockmarked the sandstone face of the cliff. Outside each one a cook-fire was smouldering to ash. Along with the sea breeze I smelled frying fish and saffron and olive oil. A high ténor voice shouted a flamenco lament at the dark sky. There was no moon but the stars were bright.

Half-seen gypsies directed me to the cave of Rafael. They were just shadows in the night and they wanted to stay that way, but as I passed I left excited whispers in my wake. It wasn't every night, that the gypsies had visitors.

A pregnant woman was frying fish in a pan outside Rafael's cave. The olive oil spattered and she drew a hand back from it. She looked up at me with dark steady eyes. Large gold earrings swung from the lobes of her ears. In the firelight her face was dark and seamed, but still drawn tight like old parchment over the fine bone structure. I decided she once had been pretty. Gypsies, particularly gypsy women, age fast.

"I'm looking for Rafael," I said in Spanish.

"There is no one here who calls himself that, señor."

"How do you call yourself?"

"I have no name."

"Whose cave is this then?"

"The cave of my man," she admitted grudgingly.

"Does he have a name?"

"Yes."

"Rafael?"

"Go away, señor."

The gypsies are secretive, and their lives are weighted down with

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superstitions ten centuries old. To know the name of a gypsy, if you are a stranger, is to have power over him.

"Tell Rafael I came from Pepe. Pepe, the norteamericano."

She took the large pan of fish off the fire, set it on a rock, and disappeared barefoot into the cave. I lit a cigarette and waited.

In a few minutes she was back. She replaced the pan on the fire. Right away the olive oil began to sizzle. She sat hunkered down near it like an Indian squaw.

She said very softly, "Is it the girl?"

"What about the girl?" I said.

"You will take her away? Señor Pepe wants her back?"

"Maybe," I said.

"It would be well, señor," she said. "The girl does not belong here."

"Why doesn't she leave?"

The woman looked up at me. "Have care, señor," she said slowly. "You do not come from Pepe if you ask that."

I realized I had made a mistake, and then I wasn't so sure. The gypsy woman said, "Take the girl and go then, with my blessings. But have care." She got up suddenly and grasped the lapels of my jacket. "Every day it is more. The way my man looks at her, the way he must touch her every chance he gets—I know what he is thinking. I know what he is thinking. I know what it is he wants." Her hands dropped to her belly that was big with child. "I have this. Always I have this. Tell my man that you are from Pepe, as you told me. You are an *estranjero*, otherwise what would you be doing here? Then take the girl and go."

I started toward the entrance to the cave.

"I do not want to be responsible for killing her," the woman said to my back.

The walls were rough-hewn, but there were old, almost threadbare carpets on the floor. The light of candles revealed a few battered old chairs, a table, even an armoire. I heard a baby crying somewhere. Low doorways with curtains hanging across them led to other rooms. I was in an apartment carved from the soft sandstone of the cliff.

"Anybody home?" I said brightly in English.

A curtain parted and a man came out. He was wearing rags and he was filthy. He hadn't shaved in a week. His skin was gypsy-dark and his eyes,

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sunk deep in a narrow skull, were shrewd and calculating. As he approached me I began to smell him.

"The girl," I said curtly. "Where is she?"

He shrugged one shoulder. It was more like a twitch.

"Come on, come on," I said then in Spanish. "Where is she?"

"You are from Señor Pepe?"

"Of course not," I snapped at him. "The Guardia Civil sent me."

He opened his mouth and revealed three yellow fangs. A sound emerged. I realized he was laughing. He jerked a large and dirty thumb toward the curtain behind him. He made the sound that he thought was laughter again. "That is good," he said. "The Guardia."

I passed through the curtain and saw Joyce Addams.

She was sitting on the edge of a bare mattress and wearing a skirt and blouse that had seen better days. A candle burned on a table near the bed. She pouted at me, the same sulky and spoiled pout that I knew from the picture I carried in my wallet. She was a lithe little brunette, twenty years old, very pretty, and at the moment trying to affect a go-to-hell look in her eyes but she was scared blue.

"I don't know you, do I?" she said quickly. "I guess I don't recognize you without the peroxide job. I'm not much good at recognizing Pepe's boys without their peroxide jobs. It's good for business, he says. It gets the swish trade of which there is gobs in Torremolinos, he says. You can't tell one of Pepe's boys without—" She began to cry.

"Who has your passport?" I asked. "Pepe or the gypsy?"

"What? My passport?"

"Your father sent me. I'm getting you out of here."

She was still crying. I patted her shoulder and made comforting sounds. I felt awkward.

She blew her nose hard. She looked up at me and put on the brittle act again, or tried to. Her voice broke a couple of times as she spoke. "Pepe has it. Trust Pepe to know how to turn a buck. After he kills me he'll sell it. Doctored, of course. You can get a thousand dollars for a valid American passport."

"I'll remember that for when I go broke," I said. "Why should he want to kill you?"

She gave me an impatient look, as if my not knowing her life was in danger was somehow denigrating. Then her eyes opened wide and fixed on something over my shoulder. I started to turn, but the room was small

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and the gypsy Rafael was both quiet on his feet and very fast, and what I did was turn toward something that smashed against the side of my head.

The candle guttered, or maybe it was just me. Whatever happened, I was in no condition to question.

A voice said, "His name is Chester Drum. He's a private detective licensed to operate in—"

Another voice cut that one off. "I can read. Hand it over." The second voice belonged to Joe Cummings.

I opened an eye and saw a ceiling the way a ceiling looks when you're very young and have been on a carousel too long. I shut the eye.

"There's water if you want," Joyce Addams said.

I touched my head and brought away a sticky hand. I swung my legs to the side of the bare mattress, where someone had thoughtfully deposited me, got them over the side, and leaned toward the floor with my head between my knees. After a while I lurched to my feet and made it to the curtain hanging in the doorway. I pulled the curtain aside. Joe Cummings and one of the peroxide boys and the gypsy were out there. Cummings had my wallet. He gave it to the peroxide boy. He was preparing to leave.

"See you later," he said to no one in particular. "About midnight?"

The gypsy, in English that would have won no elocution prizes but still English, said, "Midnight, sure. What about the girl?"

"Both of them," Cummings said.

"Got you, boss," the gypsy Rafael said, not liking it, and I knew how I had been made so fast. Who would have thought the gypsy understood English?

Cummings looked at me, grinning. "I saw my tax accountant," he said, and went out. The peroxide boy pointed a gun at me. It was a Luger. "You get to go back inside with sweetie-pie," he said.

I let the curtain drop.

"It's crazy," Joyce Addams said in what for her was a subdued voice.

She cleaned my blood-matted hair with a damp cloth. I sat back on the mattress feeling sick but not moribund, smoking a cigarette, and staring up through the smoke at the rough-hewn stone ceiling.

"I mean," she said, "everything was so predictable. I'd finish school, and there was this boy back home, my father liked him, he's going to be

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a lawyer, but he's so damned stuffy. I just couldn't stand it. Everything was all mapped out for me. I didn't like school anyway. I'm not very good at school. I took off."

"You took off," I said.

"Hitchhiking south, complete with rucksack. After a few days I wound up in Spain. San Sebastián? I was never in Spain before."

"San Sebastián," I said. "Where you met Pepe."

"I was in a bar, alone. I shouldn't have been, not a girl, not in Spain. They began to make a fuss. Joe came along and after that it was all right. I was feeling wild and free, you know? I mean, in New York or Geneva I never would have let myself get picked up at a bar. It's why I ran away, I guess."

She looked away from me. "I went back to Joe's hotel with him. I never—"

"Look," I said, "save it. You don't have to tell me the story of your life."

She didn't hear me, or didn't want to hear me. "I was smashed, really smashed. I didn't even know what I was doing. Joe saw to that. Spanish brandy all night. Boy, that Fundador. Anyway—"

"You stayed with him. You came down here. O.K. How did it begin to go sour?"

"I was drunk off and on, mostly on, till we got here. It was my revolt with a capital R. You know? Just the opposite of the life I'd led."

"What you needed was a low type. Joe is a low type. I get you."

"You don't have to be cynical. You don't understand me at all."

"Your father didn't pay me to understand you."

"Sometimes you sound just like him. My father."

"Look, Joyce," I said patiently, "the sooner you tell me what kind of trouble you're in, the sooner—"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. You're not even listening."

"I mean right here. Right now. Joe's going to kill you, you said. I want to know why."

"I'm getting to it."

I looked at my watch. It was eleven-thirty. "Get to it now."

"I guess I came to my senses. I mean, if I didn't want to lead the kind of life my father had in mind, that didn't mean I had to—well, you know. I had an argument with Joe. I said I was leaving and he said he couldn't care less. That didn't bother me—much. A clean break and all, you know.

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But then Joe said I was going just the way I came—one skirt, two blouses, a pair of jeans, and the rucksack on my back. I started getting mad.

"I followed him that night, after Pepe's closed. I don't know why. I was curious. He was always spending half the night somewhere. He went to the beach. There was a boat. A bunch of gypsies began unloading things, wooden crates. They took them up the beach to a truck. One of the cases dropped on the rocks and broke open. It was full of cameras."

"Sure," I said, "and maybe the others had automotive parts and Swiss watches and like that."

Her eyes widened. "How did *you* know?"

"Spain's a smuggler's paradise," I said. "They get the contraband in Gibraltar and sell it on the black market here."

"I went right up to Joe and said if he didn't at least give me air fare back to Geneva I was going to snitch on him. He got real mad. 'You shouldn't have seen this,' he said. 'You shouldn't have said that.'

"One of the gypsies wanted to kill me on the spot. He had this big knife and he kept looking at it and looking at me. But Joe shook his head no. He said there was no hurry. He took me here and talked to me. He said, 'Look at the position you put me in. You can blow the whistle on me any old time, can't you?' I was scared, but I was still mad. I've got this temper, you know?

"I said it was for me to know and him to find out if I ever told on him. It's crazy, but it was almost like a game, arguing with Joe like that here in the cave. Finally he said, 'O.K., baby, you asked for it,' and went away. That was last week. They haven't let me out of here since. The old man keeps looking at me and trying to paw me, and the old lady doesn't like it, and they have four children and the old man has a gun and the only thing Joe can do is kill me. He's got to, you know?"

She sat there, watching me. She'd told it all like a small child who'd run away from home, maybe took a streetcar to the end of the line or something, and then got hungry and used her pocket money on an ice cream and then walked home and got sent to her room without any supper, tired, hungry, but proud of her exploit.

Then, when I'd said nothing, she gulped a couple of times, and the second gulp became a sob and she said, "I'm scared. I'm so scared. I just wish it never happened, not any of it. I'm twenty, I ought to feel grown up after what I've been through, but it was all a mistake and I feel like a little girl. Take me home. Please, you've got to take me home."

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Pepe, I thought, might have his own ideas on the subject.

Midnight came and went, and then it was one o'clock, one-thirty, and pushing two.

I got up and pulled the curtain aside. The gypsy Rafael was seated at a table with a plate in front of him with fish tails on it and a gun alongside his fork. Near his right elbow stood a bottle of wine, almost empty. Rafael took a swig. He was a little drunk, but not so drunk that he didn't look up at me and raise the gun and shake his head. I let the curtain drop.

One of the peroxide boys showed up at two-thirty. He looked tired. His white ducks were wet almost to the hips.

"All right, let's get moving," he said in a bleak voice. There aren't a whole lot of people who like to commit murder.

The boat was riding at anchor about fifty yards out in the surf. In silhouette against the starlit night it was a fair-sized cabin cruiser. Its inboard engine was throbbing powerfully. It would be a big engine, of course; big enough to outrun the Guardia patrol boats if it had to; big enough to take us a few miles out in jig time, drop us, and still make it back before dawn. Not that when it got back would be of any importance to us.

Half a dozen gypsies were hanging around, their trousers wet. They had been unloading contraband. At first their presence surprised me, and then I realized that taking Joyce Addams for a ride had probably been their idea more than Pepe's. Life is cheap in Spain and cheaper still among the gypsies, and they were hanging around to see that Pepe did what they thought had to be done. After all, it was his *mujer* who could put a finger on them for spite.

We reached the edge of the surf. It lapped up at the sand and hissed back out to sea.

One of the gypsies approached me. He said politely, "Your shoes, señor."

I just looked at him, not getting it. He smiled. It was not an unfriendly smile at all. He pointed down at his bare feet.

"Where you are going," he said, still in that polite voice, "you will need no shoes."

"What?" I said.

"But I, I need shoes. For a favor, señor?"

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It hardly makes sense that you can laugh at a time like that, but I managed it as I bent down and removed my shoes. He took them from me gravely with a little bow. He tried them on and laced them. He took a few tentative steps forward and back. He began to smile. "They are a good fit. I thank you, señor."

The Guardia, I thought. Maybe a Guardia foot patrol would come along the beach. But I knew they wouldn't. Contraband runners from Gibraltar have to worry only about the patrol boats, unless they miss a payment at the local Casa Cuartel.

A voice called across the water: "What's holding you up?" It was Pepe.

Joyce came close and looked at me. She was trying hard not to cry. I was trying hard to smile. Once we were on that boat and once it began to move, I knew we were dead.

The peroxide boy motioned with his Luger. He and the gypsy Rafael moved out into the surf with us.

When we were still about twenty feet from the boat, a figure leaned over the side and heaved up at the anchor line. It didn't have far to come. There was a slight splash and the anchor clanged on board. By then we were thigh-deep in water. The surf was gentle but the footing uncertain. Shells and sharp rocks cut into my bare feet.

Joyce stumbled. I moved toward her, but the peroxide boy waved me off. "Rafael can handle it. He likes to."

"Keep your filthy hands off me," Joyce said. The gypsy snickered.

The boat was bobbing as we neared it. Waves lapped its hull. Two figures were leaning toward us from the cockpit—Pepe and a young gypsy. I was standing up to my hips in water that reached Joyce's waist. Rafael was still holding her.

"Easy does it," Pepe said. "He comes first."

I looked at the peroxide boy. He stood just far enough away so I couldn't go for him. He jerked the muzzle of the Luger toward the boat.

"All I came here for was the girl," I said slowly, looking up at Pepe. "Your business is your business. We could fly out of Malaga tonight."

Pepe glanced at the young gypsy, who shook his head slowly. "It's too late for that," Pepe said. "They'd cut my throat. Better come aboard."

"You're making a mistake."

"Move!"

I grabbed hold and pulled myself up over the side and into the cockpit. It was awkward work, starting in hip-deep water. Pepe got a grip on my

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jacket and yanked. The young gypsy on board stood nearby with another Luger, his legs planted unnecessarily wide against the slight rocking motion of the boat.

I got to my feet in the cockpit. It wasn't a huge boat, maybe a thirty-footer, and the three of us made a crowd in the small open area behind the cabin. I looked forward and saw a figure standing at the wheel with his back toward us, ready to take her out—another of the peroxide boys. I faced starboard again and saw Joyce's head, her hair drenched from her ducking, appear over the side.

Suddenly it dropped back out of sight and she cried out. She had lost her footing. The young gypsy with the gun started to laugh.

Rafael was grinning, half helping, half fondling Joyce as he levered her up to where Pepe could get hold of her.

The young gypsy was staring down at them. "Now there," he said in Spanish, "is a man who enjoys his work."

Rafael pawed at Joyce and lifted her.

"Damn it, cut the comedy," Pepe said.

The young gypsy began to laugh. Rafael, with a final prodigious effort, heaved Joyce aboard.

There was a moment's confusion as, soaking wet, she got slowly to her feet.

The young gypsy was still laughing when I hit him.

He slammed back against the padded bench in the rear of the cockpit. I was on him before he could get up. I got the Luger and shouted to Joyce, "Get down flat!"

She dropped obediently to the floor of the cockpit and I waved Pepe back to where the young gypsy was. "Hands all the way up," I said, "and keep them there." He obeyed. I moved to the port side of the cockpit.

A shot rang out. It was the peroxide boy in the water. He hadn't hit anybody, but now I heard yells from the beach. I aimed for his shoulder and let one go with the Luger in my hand. He screamed and flopped into the water, gun and all. Rafael was floundering back through the surf toward the beach. I saw a line of foam and dark shapes approaching us fast—the gypsies from the beach.

"Take her out," I shouted to the peroxide boy at the wheel. He just stood there.

I fired past his head. The windshield shattered, spraying him with glass.

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I was leaning against the gunwale on the port side of the cockpit, trying to look port and aft at once.

"Take her out now," I said. "Fast."

The engine roared. The boat began to move.

I watched the beach and the gypsies fade behind.

We stood a couple of hundred yards offshore and the big manmade mole that gave Malaga its harbor, ten miles up the coast from Torremolinos. I could see the lights of oceangoing ships in the harbor and the city lights of Malaga beyond, strung along the hillside above the bay.

"This is where you get off," I told Pepe.

He looked at me. He licked his lips. "You're crazy," he said. "You can't."

"Why can't I? You can swim, can't you?"

"The gypsies. I told you. They'll slit my throat."

Joyce looked at him steadily. There was something in her eyes that I hadn't seen there before. "I wonder what they'll find when they do," she said quietly.

They went over the side one at a time, the gypsy with a sneer, the peroxide boy stiffly, his face frozen with fear, Pepe with a last pleading look at Joyce.

I put the spotlight on them while they were swimming. In a few minutes they clambered up on the mole, then they were gone and I cut the light and made my way forward to the wheel.

The lights of Malaga grew ahead of us, and spread out, and became a city.

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The Man in the Lobby

by William Link and Richard Levinson

It had been a wasted morning for Wolfson. The captain had sent him over to the Golden Gate Hotel to check out a public nuisance complaint, but after a brief investigation he found that it was groundless—a few conventioneers had blundered into the wrong room after a night of carousing.

He left the elevator and glanced at the people coming in from Powell Street. It was not quite noon, but the hotel bar was already crowded with advertising men from the cluster of office buildings a few blocks away. All riding the expense account, he imagined. What would it take to pull them away from their martinis and black Russians? A stock market crash, probably. Either that or another earthquake.

Well, it was time to report back. As he started across the busy lobby he brushed by a man at the check-in desk. The face hung for an instant in his mind, then he dismissed it. At the street door he hesitated and turned back. The man at the desk was in his early fifties, meek and rumpled, with the slightly dazed expression of someone who had spent his life in front of a blackboard or an adding machine. He wore a cheap summer suit and a frayed blue shirt.

Wolfson strolled back to the counter and tried to get a better look.

"Anything on the twelfth floor?" the man was saying.

"1205 is available," said the desk clerk. "Nice and spacious." He slipped a registration card into a leather holder and pushed it across the counter. "There's a lovely view of the pagodas on Grant Street."

The man mumbled something, then signed the card and started for the elevators. Wolfson, no more than a casual foot away, instantly made the connection. He took his wallet from his back pocket and crossed to the man, tapping him on the shoulder. "San Francisco police," he said, showing his badge. "Sorry to bother you, sir, but would you mind telling me your name?"

The little man blinked at him from watery eyes.

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"Miller," he said in a fuzzy, classroom voice. "Charles Miller."

"Mind waiting here just a minute, Mr. Miller?"

Wolfson went to the desk and opened his wallet again. "I'd like to see this gentleman's registration card, please."

The clerk produced the information. "Charles Miller, 10337 Lombard Street, San Francisco."

Wolfson copied down the address and returned the card. When he swung back to Miller, the little man was staring vaguely up at the hotel clock, idly juggling the room key.

"You live here in San Francisco, don't you, Mr. Miller?"

"Yes." The voice seemed on the verge of disappearing.

"Then why are you checking into a hotel?"

Miller shrugged. "Business."

"What kind of business?"

Miller looked up again at the clock, as if he were a small boy waiting impatiently for a recess.

"What kind of business, Mr. Miller?"

"I have to meet a few people. Salesmen, mostly."

Wolfson glanced at the carpet. "And no luggage?"

"Just overnight."

Wolfson studied his face closely. Could he be mistaken? Was there a chance that this was a look-alike, a near-perfect double? There was a tiny white scar just below Miller's left eye that seemed to underscore the man's essential blankness. That scar and the rest of the description could be checked by teletype this afternoon.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you for some identification."

After a slight pause the man patted most of his pockets and finally fished an old wallet from somewhere inside his jacket. He held it out.

"No, you go through it. Social security card, driver's license. Anything."

The man thumbed through a small packet of cards and handed him a license. It was State of California issue and the name was Charles Miller.

As Wolfson studied it a group of bystanders had begun to gather, trying to edge closer.

"Sorry to trouble you like this, Mr. Miller, but I'd like you to come with me. It shouldn't take more than a half-hour or so."

The little man looked wistfully at the elevators. "But I thought I could . . ." His voice threatened to disappear again. "Is it important?" he asked.

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"I've got a car outside. It'll be as quick as I can make it."

"Well . . . I suppose so." He looked down at the key in his white, plump hand. "What should I do?"

Wolfson began to feel a little sorry for him. "You've already registered. They'll hold the room for you." He guided the man toward the door. "You'll be back in plenty of time to keep your appointments."

Outside in the bright, almost holiday air, Miller seemed dazed and lost. A cable car jangled, and he stiffened upright with the sound. Wolfson took his arm and led him up the hill, watching him carefully. The man was blinking hard in the glittering sunlight, but he looked more bewildered than trapped.

When they reached the automobile Wolfson held open the door, then got in and started the engine, throwing his companion a quick, assessing glance. The man was staring down at his hands, still toying with the key.

"Mr. Miller," Wolfson said, driving toward Market, "there's something that bothers me. You haven't once asked why I'm taking you in."

Miller shrugged listlessly. They were passing Union Square and a pigeon sprang gray and frightened across the windshield.

"Why aren't you interested?"

"I imagine I'll find out."

"I imagine you will." It would take only a short time to verify. And he was pretty sure that Miller wouldn't be returning to his hotel.

He parked the car a block off Market and walked the little man up the steps of the station house. There was no one in the squad room, just a few stale newspapers and the smell of new paint. He left Miller alone in the interrogation room and went down the corridor of Sy Pagano's office.

Pagano was leaning on the windowsill, looking up at the sky. "I haven't seen a gull in weeks," he said. "You think it's the fallout of something?"

Wolfson didn't bother closing the door. "Got something, Sy."

"Yeah?"

"Brought in a man by the name of Charles Miller. I think it's an alias."

Pagano was looking up at the sky again. "Who do you think he is?"

"Frederick Lerner. The school teacher from Santa Barbara who killed those two women last week."

Pagano turned abruptly from the window. "Are you sure it's him?"

"The description fits. L.A. sent a wire-photo up yesterday. They mentioned he might have headed for San Francisco."

"Where'd you spot him?"

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"The Golden Gate Hotel. He was checking in without luggage."

Pagano picked up the phone and punched a button. "I'll call L.A., get more information. Where've you got him?"

"Interrogation." Wolfson went out and walked back to the other office. Miller was sitting in a chair, looking at the wall. His eyes squinted slightly in the bright rush of light from the window. Wolfson drew the shade and sat down with him. He took his time lighting a cigarette. "Sorry. You want one?"

"I don't smoke."

"How long have you lived in San Francisco, Mr. Miller?"

The little man rubbed his eyes. "Only a few weeks."

"Where did you live before that?"

"New York. My company sent me out here."

Wolfson got up, went back to the window. There was no one in the street beneath the half-lowered shade. A church clock chimed the hour and he checked it with his watch. "What line of work are you in, Mr. Miller?"

"Heavy goods jobbing."

"Married?"

There was a pause while the chimes succeeded each other like ripples in water. "Yes, I'm married."

"Happen to have a picture of your wife?"

"Is it important?"

Wolfson came back to him. The man's face was in half-shadow, but blinked up at the detective.

"It's important, Mr. Miller. Do you have one?"

The old wallet came out again. The man fumbled through the celluloid card folder, then held up a photograph. Wolfson took it over to the light. It was a crisp new picture of an attractive blonde, considerably younger than her husband. There was an interesting pout to the mouth. "Married long?" he asked.

"Few weeks."

The door opened and Pagano came in, carrying a file folder. "This is my partner, Mr. Miller, Lieutenant Pagano. You make that call, Sy?"

"Tried. The lines are tied up."

Wolfson took the photograph over to him. "This is Mr. Miller's wife."

Pagano studied it expressionlessly. He opened the file folder and removed two photos, tilting them so that only his partner could see.

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"The victims," he said.

Wolfson touched the photos, moving them to catch the light. They both showed middle-aged women with vacant, trusting faces. Neither resembled the blonde.

"Your wife at home, Mr. Miller?" Pagano asked suddenly. It was his first acknowledgement of the man's presence.

"Yes."

Wolfson picked up the phone. "What's the number?"

Miller swung around quickly in the chair. "No—she's not at home. I made a mistake."

Wolfson met Pagano's eyes. "Oh? Where is she then?"

"She—left for Nevada this morning. Visiting some friends."

"I see. Has she got a phone number there?"

"No."

Pagano came around the side of the desk. "Stand up, Miller."

Miller got awkwardly to his feet.

"See that blackboard on the far wall? Why don't you go over there and pick up that piece of chalk."

Miller did as he was told.

"Fine," said Pagano, glancing at Wolfson again. "Now write something on the blackboard."

The little man seemed ready to cry. "What should I write?"

"Anything. I don't care."

Miller was motionless for a moment, then his hand glided up and he wrote "Charles Miller" in a graceful, sweeping line. He started to turn around but Pagano called, "No, stay there. Write your name again."

While Miller wrote, Pagano took the wallet from the desk and dug out the driver's license. *Nice*, Wolfson thought. *Very nice.* Over Pagano's shoulder, he compared the signature on the card with the writing on the board. They matched.

"You're pretty good at that blackboard," Pagano observed. "Some guys would have that chalk squeaking like a mouse. But not you. You sure you're not a school teacher or something?"

"Well . . . I've had some experience with blackboards," the little man said. He still faced away from them.

"Really?" Pagano said.

"Yes. Before my company sent me out here I was teaching some of the younger men, the sales trainees."

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"But you never did any teaching at a school?"

"No."

Wolfson walked to the blackboard. "Here's another name. I want you to write 'Frederick Lerner'. Would you do that for me?"

The hand swung up without hesitation. It wrote the name in the same sure, graceful way.

"Uh-huh," Wolfson said. He went back to Pagano and gestured at the folder. Pagano opened it, and Wolfson removed another photo. He set it face up on the desk under the unlit lamp. "You can come back now, Mr. Miller. Have a seat."

The little man returned to the desk, blinking in confusion at them. He sat down wearily.

Wolfson pointed at the lamp. "Mind turning on the light? I want to show you something."

Miller snapped on the switch and then started, his hands gripping the arms of the chair. He was staring down at the photograph, a slow flush staining his face. "Where did you get that?" he asked.

"From our files," said Wolfson. He and Pagano edged closer to the desk. "It's a picture of a man named Frederick Lerner. He killed two women in Santa Barbara last week."

"But—but that's a picture of me," Miller protested. He picked it up and stared. "That's *me.*"

Pagano took the photo out of his hands. "The Los Angeles police got it from the yearbook of that private school where you used to teach."

Miller shook his head. "That's impossible. I was never in Santa Barbara in my life. Anybody can tell you that, anybody!"

"Can they?" Pagano said. "How about your new wife? Can she tell us that?"

Miller turned pale, almost the color of the photograph. He lowered his eyes and brought a cupped hand to his forehead. "There's been a mistake," he mumbled. "You've got me mixed up with someone else."

Pagano dropped down in the chair beside him. "Where'd you get that wallet, Lerner? Who is Charles Miller?"

"*I'm* Charles Miller!" The little man seemed close to tears. "You can ask my friends, my business associates. They can tell you."

Pagano leaned closer. "I think you're a liar. You killed those two women, and you came up here to hide. Look at me!"

"It's all a mistake! Can't you see that?"

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Pagano's voice grew louder, more insistent. "I think you should make a statement. I think you should tell us about those two women."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

Wolfson interceded. "Take it easy, Sy. We still don't have a positive identification."

"This guy is Frederick Lerner. The photo matches, he lied about having a wife, and he used that blackboard like a pro. I say book him."

Wolfson thought it over. For a moment he wished he had never recognized the man, had walked right by him.

"What do we do?" Pagano pressed. "Lock him up or let him run? Come on, buddy, make up your mind."

Wolfson looked down at the little man. He was holding the photograph of Lerner again, studying it with dull incomprehension.

"Okay, we book him. I'm still not as sure as you are, but we can't take a chance."

"Take my word," Pagano said. "Everything checks."

"Let's go, Mr. Miller," Wolfson touched him gently on the shoulder. "First stop is Fingerprints."

Miller nodded. He stood up and groped his way toward the door.

Pagano leaned against the windowsill, slapping the file angrily against his hip. "When you're finished," he said, "bring him back. I'm going to try L.A. again."

He was beginning to dial the phone when Wolfson closed the door.

In the fingerprint office Miller was disinterested as they rolled his fingers on the inked glass. Wolfson sat in a corner, smoking a cigarette and thinking. Something was wrong; Charles Miller—or whatever his name was—was too mild, too apathetic for a murderer.

A minute later there was a soft knocking at the door and Pagano looked in. "Wolfson? Could I see you?"

Wolfson followed him out, stamping his cigarette into the scarred floor. "You reach L.A.?"

"Yeah." Pagano didn't look at him directly. "They picked up Frederick Lerner last night."

"What!"

"Caught him hiding out in a friend's place near the U.C.L.A. campus. It's him, no chance of error."

Wolfson tried not to show his relief. "How do you like that!" he said. "The guy looks just like him. The two could be twins."

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Pagano sighed and held up his hands. "We goofed. We've done it before, we'll do it again. Look, you want to explain things to our friend in there? I'm not good on apologies. Tell him we're sorry, we made a mistake, the works." He grinned sourly. "You were always the diplomat. And give him a lift back to the hotel. He looks like he's gonna collapse any minute."

It was a silent drive to the Golden Gate. Miller sat brooding in the front seat, completely withdrawn. He had taken Wolfson's apology blankly, once or twice looking at the smudge marks on his fingers.

"Tell you what," Wolfson said, trying to brighten the atmosphere. "We'll have a drink at the hotel. On me."

Miller shook his head.

"No, thanks. You don't have to do that."

"All right, but don't worry about anything. Nobody will ever know it happened. We didn't put you on the blotter so there's no record."

In the lobby of the Golden Gate Wolfson managed an awkward goodbye and sent the little man toward the bank of elevators. When he doors slid closed he breathed a sigh of relief. The next time he would think twice before taking someone in for questioning.

He was about to leave when he heard his name being paged. There was a telephone call for him at the main desk.

Pagano was on the line.

"Thought I could catch you there. On a hunch, I called Miller's place on Lombard. His wife answered."

Wolfson frowned.

"I thought he said she was in Nevada."

"He lied. She's going to Nevada all right, but not to visit any friends. Reno, Nevada."

"She's divorcing him?"

"That's right. You should have heard her on the phone. Sounds like a real swinger. She says it broke him up pretty bad but she doesn't care. Guess it was one of those May and December things."

"The poor guy," Wolfson said. "And we didn't make matters any easier for him."

"Yeah. Well, I thought you'd be interested. That'll be the last you'll ever hear of Mr. Charles Miller."

"Okay, Sy. Thanks."

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He hung up and walked across the lobby to the doors on Powell Street. Well, it all figured. That's why Miller had seemed so indifferent and apathetic, even before he was asked to go downtown.

Outside, all along the curb, a crowd was beginning to gather. Cars had stopped and people were running up from the shops on Geary. Curious, Wolfson pushed throught the door and looked up the steep stone slope of the hotel building. Miller stood on a ledge high up near the top, looking down at the crowd.

Now he knew why the little man had wanted a room on the twelfth floor.

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A Message from Andrea

by Robert Colby

Stanford Tillman, one of the ten richest men in the world, numbered among his holdings the Tillman Land Development Company, Tillman Real Estate, Tillman Mining, Tillman Oil, and a controlling interest in the Tricontinental All Risk Insurance Company.

Tillman, a lean, athletic forty-two, lived in Bel Air, in a rambling house surrounded by grand old trees amid casual groupings of shrubs and flowers. There were three servants: a maid and a cook who commuted daily, and a chauffeur, Fred Hammond, who lived in quarters above the garage.

Although his place was not nearly so pretentious as some in the neighborhood, Tillman had no need for a mansion, for only he and his twenty-eight year old wife, Andrea, lived there. They had been married just over a year and were still in the honeymoon stage. Stanford was not simply in love with Andrea; she was a more obsessive passion than his whole commercial empire, and Andrea worshiped him.

That was the way it was on a Monday evening in October, as Tillman prepared to leave for Sacramento. There, in concert with other brass who controlled the insurance companies dominating California, he was to meet with the governor to discuss a proposed bill for mandatory auto insurance.

It was dusk. The dark-blue limousine had been brought around to the front of the house and Hammond was loading a suitcase into the trunk. Stanford Tillman, carrying a portfolio containing pertinent insurance statistics for the meeting, appeared in the doorway with Andrea. She was a beautiful woman, with a superbly proportioned figure and her proud, queenly stance seemed effortless, almost casual.

Tillman's strong, youthful features were sun-bronzed and unlined. He did not appear to be incongruously matched with Andrea, despite a difference of fourteen years in their ages.

With an arm about her waist, he said, "Sure you wouldn't like to come along with me? Three days without you will be absolute torture."

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"Oh, I know, I know." She frowned unhappily. "But none of the other wives are going and I'd be at loose ends. Still, I might fly up Wednesday afternoon and then we could have one night and come back together Thursday."

"A fine idea! Is that a promise?" he pleaded.

"Mmm." She nodded. "I do solemnly swear."

"Then we'll plan something special for Wednesday night. Ride with me to the airport and we'll discuss it on the way."

"I'd love to, darling, but there wouldn't be time. I'm due at the Brunswicks for dinner and I haven't begun to get ready."

"Well, I'm glad you'll be staying with Janis and Chet. You'd be depressed rattling around the house alone, and I'd worry." He glanced at his watch. "See you Wednesday, then, sweetheart. Meantime, I'll phone you at the Brunswicks—incessantly."

She turned and lifted her face toward him and he kissed her.

"I'll miss you terribly," she murmured. "I really am a lost child without you."

"Hey, it's only Sacramento, not the far side of the moon, baby," he said. "But don't forget, I love you, honey." He kissed her once more, quickly, then entered the limousine.

Waving, Andrea watched the taillights coast around the curve of the drive, winking once brightly at the road beyond the gate, turning right, then gone.

She went upstairs to their bedroom and began to undress for her bath. Jan Brunswick was an old chum and her best friend so Andrea was looking forward to a couple of days with her (despite Chet, who was jolly but shallow), and the two thundering Brunswick kids, who would be mostly in school. The round trip to the airport should take Fred no more than an hour and a half, by which time she ought to be dressed and waiting for him to drive her to the Brunswick house in Pacific Palisades.

Andrea had stepped from the bath and was drying herself when she heard a muted thump, as of a door closing. Wilma, the maid, had left earlier, while Debby, the cook, had remained to fix dinner for Stan. No doubt that was Debby making her exit from the kitchen, though she should have been gone by now. Her husband, an itinerant gardener, called for her nightly in his truck.

Andrea listened for the starter whine of the truck but heard nothing, and was nudged by a soft finger of alarm. Since Stan was, if anything,

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overprotective, she was rarely left alone in the house. Yet it was equally rare for Stan to take any sort of trip without her, and this was just an accident of circumstance.

By her tiny, jeweled wristwatch, it would be at least another hour before Fred returned with the limousine. Her clothes were laid out on the bed and she dressed quickly, not really frightened, but a bit unnerved.

She went to the head of the stairs and peered down. A couple of lamps in the living room cast a pale glow into the hallway. Cocking her head, she listened. There was nothing but the dignified hush of twilight, the reward to those who can purchase the deep privacy of space and isolation. She descended the stairs and switched on more lamps to cheer the dusky living room.

There! That was much better. It was silly to be edgy just because she was left alone for a short time. She was spoiled by too much attention, Andrea reasoned. She crossed to the dining room, entered the kitchen. As expected, it was dark. Though she didn't hear the gardener's truck starting and grinding off, it must have been Debby leaving for the night.

With a shrug, Andrea lighted the kitchen and went to see if the back door had been securely locked.

Fred Hammond braked the limousine before the house, and rang the door chime to signal Mrs. Tillman that he had returned. Then he waited behind the wheel, smoking a cigarette. Hammond, gray and craggy-faced and almost sixty, was a tall, solid chunk of a man, nearly as trim and muscular as he had been at forty, when he was one of the private security cops who made nightly rounds of the Bel Air estates in a patrol car.

He had been Stanford Tillman's chauffeur for a good many years and had no desire to be anything else. Tillman paid him handsomely and treated him more like a friend than an employee. There was a strong, unspoken bond between them. When Tillman married Andrea, he had told Hammond that henceforth his most important duty would be to keep watch over Mrs. Tillman in his absence, guarding her from the least harm or disturbance. Hammond was pleased to be trusted with such an assignment, for he had discovered at once that Andrea Tillman was a warm, undemanding person who seemed basically unaffected by two of the world's most generous gifts, wealth and beauty.

After a few minutes, when Andrea did not appear, Hammond went around to the back door. He had a ring of keys in his hand and was

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preparing to unlock the door when he saw that it was ajar. Debby must still be around, he figured, and he was going to give her all kinds of hell for being so careless; but then, when he stepped in and tried to close the door, he found that it would not latch.

Bending for a closer look, he understood. The door had been jimmied! The implication caused him to stand in petrified shock for a moment, listening in a vacuum so intense that he could catch the faint sighing of the wind, the whispery whine of the refrigerator.

He bolted through the lighted kitchen and rushed to the foot of the stairs. After shouting her name, he went up to Mrs. Tillman's bedroom. Her door was open, the lights blazing. Everything seemed in good order, so he crossed to the bathroom, glanced at the sunken tub, still damp, and into the empty stall shower. Her purse stood open on the vanity and he poked a finger inside. The contents included a cosmetic bag, an expensive lighter, and a wallet. The wallet was stuffed with bills.

He made a quick search of the other bedrooms, then went below, where he saw that in the living room a lamp and a table had been overturned. On the carpet, just beyond, was one of Andrea's shoes and her jeweled wristwatch, its platinum band twisted when the watch was wrenched off in the struggle. The study was empty, but the door had been smashed in. This indicated, Hammond concluded, that Andrea had fled to the study where she had locked herself in, perhaps hoping to escape by a window, or gain enough time to use the phone.

In any case, it all became clear when he reached the front door.

A note had been attached to the inside of the door by means of a thumbtack. Printed on a piece of cheap yellow paper in severe block letters that must have been fashioned with a ruler, the note read:

> Stanford Tillman:
>
> We are holding your wife for a ransom of *one million dollars*. She has not been harmed but we will return her to you in sections if you do not obey the following instructions:
>
> 1. Do not inform the police or the FBI. Keep this matter secret from *all* persons, trust no one!
> 2. You have *one* day to gather the money. The bills must be *old* and *unmarked*, in denominations of fifty and one hundred dollars. Place the money in a suitcase and keep it in your house, ready for delivery on Tuesday evening.
> 3. Further orders will come to you by phone after six p.m. to-

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morrow. At this time your wife will be allowed to speak to you briefly.

Don't try to play cops and robbers with us, or she will be dead.

One million or your wife—take your choice!

Hammond read the ransom note without touching the paper. Using his handkerchief, he removed the note and folded it into a pocket of his uniform jacket. He went back to the study, sat behind the desk and pondered what to do next. Mr. Tillman had been flown to Sacramento in his own jet. It was a short hop in a fast plane, yet there had not been time for him to reach the hotel. Nevertheless, Hammond placed a call, leaving an urgent message for Tillman to phone home immediately upon his arrival.

He phoned Mrs. Brunswick and told her that at the very last second Mrs. Tillman had decided to fly to Sacramento with her husband. She had asked Hammond to convey her regrets and to apologize for her inability to call in person.

This done, Hammond sat waiting. In a little over thirty minutes Tillman rang, his usually calm voice now edged with tension.

"What's the trouble, Fred? Is Mrs. Tillman all right, or why—"

"Well, I—I believe so, but—"

"You *believe* so? What does that mean, Fred?"

"I can't possibly tell you on the phone, Mr. Tillman. Not if there's any chance we could be overheard."

"I see." His voice sank.

"You'd better come home, sir. It's a big problem, real trouble."

"Fred, you're scaring hell out of me, you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I know. But try to keep cool, sir. It's something we can work out if you'll hurry back."

"Is there some way you can help until I arrive?"

"No, sir. I can do nothing further. There are decisions to be made, and there's a great deal of money involved. But I would suggest that you cover your trail with some logical reason for leaving, one that won't arouse suspicions."

"Yes, I understand. In fact, I think I've got the whole picture. Are you alone there?"

"Yes."

"And Mrs. Tillman has been—detained?"

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"Yes, that's right. Exactly. I called the Brunswicks, said she went with you."

"Good. Then drive to the airport and wait for me, Fred."

Seated in the study with Fred Hammond, Tillman had placed the ransom note before him on the desk, Andrea's tangled watch resting beside it. When he saw the watch and the lone shoe, his face crumpled, but then he quickly composed himself.

"I'm not going to touch this note with my bare hands," he said, "but I don't think there's any chance that a single print will be found on it."

Nodding, Hammond nervously fingered his uniform cap. "Does that mean you intend to call the police?"

"No, no!" Tillman shook his head, lighted a cigarette. "I don't care a damn about the money. I'm going to pay the ransom. It's only important to save Mrs. Tillman. Do you agree? I want your honest opinion, Fred."

"I wouldn't give you my opinion," said the chauffeur. "It might influence you to make the wrong move. Then I'd never forgive myself."

"Unless there's a change in the situation, my decision is final, Fred. I just want you to tell me what you think."

"In your place, I'd do the same thing, Mr. Tillman. But I might hedge my bet a little," he suggested.

"How would you do that, Fred?"

"I'd pay the ransom but I'd inform the police of every turn. I'd have them standing by, just in case."

"In case they don't let her go?" he asked.

"No. By the time you were sure they weren't going to turn her loose, it would be too late. But when the delivery is made, that's when these creeps are most vulnerable. The cops might be able to tail the pickup man to the hiding place. That's important, because if the kidnappers are going to . . . silence Mrs. Tillman, they won't do it until they've got the money."

"Why not?"

"Until they have the cash, they need her for insurance. They can't put her on the phone, otherwise, to break you down."

Pursing his lips, Tillman considered. "I see your point. The police could give us an advantage."

"Sure. They might even take the contact man into custody and make him talk."

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"Yes, they might. But this has been well-planned and I have a hunch we're not dealing with amateurs. They'll be watching for a trap and if the cops tip their hand, the kidnappers will run scared. If they see the net closing in, their first thought might be to get rid of Andrea, then scatter in all directions. No, I can't afford to risk it, Fred. And I want your solemn pledge to keep this from the police. Not a word. Just don't interfere."

"I wouldn't think of it," he answered. "I wouldn't do anything to jeopardize Mrs. Tillman's safety. She's a fine person and I'm very fond of her."

"Thank you, Fred," Tillman said quietly, and seemed on the verge of tears. "But I'm not just fond of her. I love her beyond words. I own a good slice of this world but I'd give it all up, and my life in the bargain, if I could save her. That's how fond of her I am, Fred." Tillman sealed his eyes as if in prayer.

Abruptly he then reached into a drawer and came up with an address book. He began to search it for a number. "A million dollars cash," he said with a wry face, "is quite a chunk of money to raise quickly and deviously—even for me. So I'd better get the ball rolling tonight."

He reached for the phone.

The ransom call came at six twenty-five the next evening. Tillman answered, and Fred Hammond picked up an extension phone at the same instant.

"Mr. Stanford Tillman?" a male voice, soft and cool, inquired.

"Yes, yes, Tillman speaking."

"You have the money? One million in fifties and hundreds?" Though the enunciation was careful, the grammar good, there was the mildest hint of a foreign accent.

"Yes, the money is here in a suitcase, ready for delivery."

"The bills are old and unmarked?"

"Yes, as you demanded." Tillman contained an urge to shout an obscene threat.

"Very well. Now, sir, you will leave with the ransom at once for San Francisco in your private plane. But for the pilot, you will travel alone. A reservation has been made for you at the Wellington Bayview Hotel. You will check in and go to your room, you will not leave it until you have further instructions. Is that clear?"

"I understand, yes."

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"You may have a considerable wait, perhaps a day or two. Do not use the phone, simply wait. Your contact will say, 'I have a message from Andrea.' Do not take orders from anyone who does not use this identification.

"We will be watching. We will be able to detect the police by the most sophisticated means. If they are present, we will chop off your wife's hand and mail it to you—the left one with the rings. Next, you will receive a foot, and then—"

"Why, you filthy—"

"And then, if you are still not persuaded, we will make you a present of her beautiful head. Now, one minute has passed and we will allow you fifteen seconds to speak with your wife."

There was a pause. In the background, Tillman could hear what seemed the hollow rumble of traffic crossing a bridge, the deep bass of a ship's horn.

"Hello—Stan?"

"Yes, Andrea, yes, darling, it's Stan. Are you all right?"

"Yes, and that's the only question I can answer. But, Stan, I'm so frightened! These people are going to do some horrible things to me if you don't pay, or if you bring in the police. I'm convinced they'll kill me if you don't deliver the money. Darling, I love you—and please hurry! I can't bear another day of this—"

Andrea was sliced off. The line was empty.

"Well," Tillman said grimly, "what do you think, Fred?"

Hammond ran fingers nervously through the gray bristle of his hair. "I don't think they're bluffing," he answered. "Sometimes from a voice you can get the personality, the character of a man—and that one is a little colder than death."

Tillman nodded.

"I got the same feeling. The threat he made about Andrea's hand . . . It makes me shudder. Because I have this conviction that he means it absolutely, means it literally. He's psychotic, demented. If I could have just one minute alone with him!"

"Did you notice the foreign accent, sir? Very slight, I had to strain to catch it."

"Yes. I'd say he's a Latin type, well-educated. What else did you notice, Fred? How about sounds in the background?"

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"There was traffic noise, definitely. Heavy traffic nearby, with that hollow drumming of wheels on a bridge."

"I agree," said Tillman. "They were in a building near a bridge, over water, I think. Just before Andrea came on, I heard the blast of a ship's horn. It was unmistakable."

"San Francisco Bay?"

"Possibly, yes. It would make sense, since that's where I'm to deliver the ransom." Tillman stood. "I'd better get moving, Fred. You call Mike at the airport and tell him I'll be taking off for San Francisco within the hour. He's been alerted to stand by until further notice."

"You want me to cover with an excuse for the quick trip, sir?"

"If he asks what it's about, say you overheard talk of a big business deal in the works."

"All right, sir. And then I'll be waiting in the limousine for you."

"I'll be only a minute." In passing, he dropped a hand to Fred's shoulder. "I'm glad you're on my team, Fred. It's a terrible time for me, the worst in my life. And I don't know what I'd do without you."

With a million dollars cash in an outsized suitcase, Stanford Tillman arrived that night at the Wellington Bayview in San Francisco. There was indeed a reservation in his name and after checking in, he ascended to a room perched high above the city, having a grand view of the bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. For a period he stood by the window, wondering if perhaps somewhere out there, in a sordid, makeshift prison, Andrea waited in terror for him to buy her freedom. Although it was one of the highest ransoms in history, Tillman was eager to pay it, had given no thought to the money, except as a means to an end.

He left the window and after stripping off his jacket and tie, sat in a chair with his feet propped by the big suitcase—that million dollar ottoman. His face was grim.

Near one a.m. he closed his eyes for the first time, and fitfully slept upright in the chair, though the room was fully lighted. A few minutes after two, the phone rang. Instantly awake, he lifted the receiver.

"Stanford Tillman," he said.

"I have a message from Andrea." It was the same icy-smooth voice.

"I'm listening," said Tillman.

"You have it with you?"

"Yes."

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"Go to the lobby at once. Ask at the desk for an envelope in your name. It will contain an aerial map. Return to your room with the map, and hurry. There will be another call with final instructions for the delivery. You have exactly five minutes. If you miss the next call, there will not be another."

Tillman put up the phone, glanced at his watch, pulled on his jacket and went out the door. Locking it, he plunged down the corridor to the elevators.

"Someone left an envelope for me," he told the clerk, then gave his name and room number.

After a puzzled search, the clerk shook his head. "Sorry, Mr. Tillman, there's nothing at all for you, sir. Perhaps a bit later. Would you like me to—"

"No, never mind," Tillman said. He dashed off to the elevator and returned to his room.

He wasn't at all surprised to find the suitcase gone. There was another of those geometrical, block-printed notes on the bed:

> If the count is correct, your wife will be driven back to Los Angeles tonight and released. Be patient. If there is a delay, do not call police!

Tillman sighed. Another torturous wait; was it a stall? Well, he would give them all that night, plus six hours' leeway. No longer; and the minute Andrea was safe at home, the hunt would be on!

It was midmorning of the same day, butAndrea did not know that it was daylight because her watch had been taken and the third-floor room had no windows. There was air-conditioning, however. From a vent near the ceiling, chilled air drifted down.

The room, with an adjoining, windowless bath, was furnished with a bed, a couple of chairs and a table. There was also a lamp which she left burning to dispel her fear and loneliness. The cell was entered by means of a concealed panel made of metal but finished on the outside to match the exterior wall. The room was soundproof and Andrea had been told that it had been redesigned for the purpose of holding her prisoner.

Andrea was fed simple but adequate meals three times a day, and by these meals she could approximate the time. Her last meal had been dinner, but that was too many hours ago, it seemed, and no one had arrived with breakfast. She sensed that the delay had some special mean-

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ing which she felt was not encouraging but ominous. Suppose they left her here to die?

Thinking about it, she began to pace. The entire plan had been so diabolically clever, and yet three of the people involved were totally incongruous. Certainly their breed was not capable of deliberate, calculated murder, even for a million dollars; and surely they would let her go.

She was neither stupid nor naive, but the way it happened, who could possibly say that she should have seen it coming? From her bedroom she had heard a sound which, looking back, was nothing more sinister than Debby going out by way of the kitchen door. It must have been one of those days when her husband, working in another part of town, did not call for Debby in his gardening truck, and she walked to Sunset Boulevard instead and caught a bus; but it was an odd coincidence, or perhaps intuition, that she had been curiously uneasy.

She had checked the kitchen door and had found it locked. She had then gone back up to her bedroom and was in the process of applying her makeup when the phone rang. It was Claire Vanderhoff who lived in the big stone house next door. Claire was about her age, perhaps a couple of years older. She had been divorced and was recently married to Dwight Vanderhoff of the Vanderhoff Steamship Company.

The company was founded by Dwight's father who had left him the house and a few millions to boot, it was said. Dwight was vice-president in charge of the West Coast office, while his older brother was president and ran the big show out of New York. The Vanderhoffs were alone in the house, but for a live-in servant couple, the man doubling as butler-chauffeur. The Vanderhoffs, complaining that they could not get reliable help, had discharged their servants about three months previously, and hired new ones. Apparently they were pleased with the present pair.

The Tillmans had been dinner guests at the Vanderhoffs on occasion, and vice versa. They were all members of the tennis club and often played doubles on the Tillmans' court. Born of proximity and initiated by the Vanderhoffs, the friendship had not been deep, but they were at least a convivial foursome who shared a common interest in tennis. Over cocktails, Stan and Dwight had talked Big Business, while Claire and Andrea chatted of this and that, mostly surface trivia.

On the phone, Claire had sounded breathless. "Andrea, something dreadful has happened! Dwight said he wasn't feeling well and I wastaking

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him up to bed when he suddenly gasped, and then collapsed. He looks gray, he looks awful! I can hardly find a pulse. Andrea, I'm all alone. Our couple, Nita and Kirk, have gone to the movies. I've sent for a doctor, but meanwhile I think he's dying and I don't know what to do. Could you and Stan come over to help me?"

"Oh, Claire, of course! But Stan went up to Sacramento for a conference with the governor—thought we told you. I'm all alone myself at the moment, but I'll be right over, dear."

"Please hurry, Andrea! To save time, cut across the grounds and come through the hedge behind the tennis court. You know, that little gap."

"Yes, yes! Don't panic, Claire. I'll be there in half a minute!"

She had raced from the house, and darting across the lawn to the space in the hedge behind the court, she had squeezed through and dashed to the front door.

Claire had opened at the first ring. "This way, darling," she said. "I'm just pitiful when it comes to an emergency. I go all to pieces!"

They crossed the living room, which was bleakly lighted and in gloomy shadow, heavy draperies drawn over the windows. Though the atmosphere was oppressive, Andrea had no sense of danger or menace, only a feeling that the scene was incomprehensively subdued, as if they were to be confronted, not by Dwight in a state of collapse, but by a candle-ringed coffin.

They turned into a dim hallway, at the end of which she could see the stairs, though not a sign of Dwight. Then, although she did not actually hear a sound, she had the impression that someone was behind her. She hesitated. Peering over her shoulder, she had a fleeting glimpse of Kirk, the butler-chauffeur, his upraised hand clutching a towel.

Fingers closed around the back of her neck and at the same instant the towel, moist and malodorous, was clamped smotheringly over her face.

After a timeless void, she awoke in this cell of a room on the third floor. She was lying supine on the bed, her shoes removed, her watch gone. Claire was seated at the foot the bed, Dwight standing behind her. The other two, Kirk and Nita, shorn of their servants' uniforms, hovered just above her, observing with the clinical expressions of doctor and nurse attending a patient.

"Now, Andrea," said Dwight, "you're in this cozy pad on the third floor and you have nothing to fear. We're not going to hurt you, not unless you become rebellious, that is." He was a beefy man of middle height.

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Close to forty, his florid, puffy-eyed face was marked by the erosions of self-indulgence. "You may still be a little groggy from the drug," he continued, "but you've only been out for twenty minutes. And while you were under, we broke into your house and set the stage, so to speak. Then we left a ransom note for Stanford. It demands a million dollars, a truly modest sum for the return of such a precious jewel."

Andrea was a bit dizzy and slightly nauseated, but her mind was clear and, though with astonishment, she understood well enough. "I can't believe this is real," she said. "I can't believe you would do such a thing. You practically run Vanderhoff Shipping and you've got millions." Aided by Claire, she propped herself up, against the headboard. "Dwight, I thought we were friends. Have you gone crazy?"

He shook his head. "Andrea, like everyone else, you've been snowed by the illusion that I'm rich. My older brother, Floyd Vanderhoff, runs the company from New York. He is *very* rich but I'm just a figurehead, and extremely poor, by our standards."

Andrea gasped and stared. "I still don't get it," she said.

"Very well, I'll explain," he said smugly. "You see, I had shown no inclination to work, and my father knew that, without money or position, I would become a glorified bum, thus defacing the untarnished image of the Vanderhoff name. So he gave me the bogus title of vice-president in charge of the West Coast branch of the company. I have a grand office and a big front, but absolutely no active function.

"As long as I check in sober every morning and remain on the premises until closing, I receive three hundred a week and the use of this house, owned and maintained by the company, complete with two servants of my choice. But Andrea, three hundred a *day* would not fill my extravagant needs, let alone three hundred a week. Right?

"So we have conceived this invincible plan to relieve Stan Tillman of a million tax-free dollars. As friends and neighbors, we had a built-in spy system, and now we can watch from our windows to see if the cops are arriving to campaign our entrapment. As for a clincher, try this one: we can't miss knowing which way Stan will jump at all times, because we have a tap on your phone!

"Beautiful, oh beautiful!" he said. Beaming, he rubbed his palms together joyously.

"I can't understand," said Andrea gravely, "why you would confess all this to me, and reveal your identity, unless you intend to kill me."

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"My dear Andrea, we could be classed as kidnappers, perhaps, though you came here of your own accord. But killers, never. No, we can give you the whole blueprint of our scheme, but in the end it will be of no value to you. Because by the time a certain message reaches Tillman, informing him that you are only next door in this room, we will be lost beyond a trace in a remote corner of the globe where no questions are asked. And the only requirement is enough coin to pay the tab. Now do you understand?"

"Just the same, you talk too damn much, Vanderhoff," said Kirk, who had been shifting restively in place, his expression a sneer of impatience. "We have work to do. Let's get on with it." Kirk seemed younger than Vanderhoff. Tall and slender, he had a long, stone-quiet face and frozen, lusterless dark eyes. His hair was midnight black, his complexion swarthy and finely pocked.

Dwight shrugged and said, "This is our mastermind, Kirk Pardo, who used to supply me with happy pills back east. When he came out to L.A. and looked me up, I confided my secret, told him I was hungry for quick gold, and didn't care how I got it. Kirk found my setup perfect for his larcenous talents, and we joined forces. He brought along Nita, Kirk's little playmate."

"Oh thanks, thanks a bunch, Dwight," Nita said sourly. She was a tiny brunette with sharp little features and an awesome figure. She looked coarse beside Claire.

Ignoring Nita, Dwight said, "Kirk was a surgeon in another state before he was deposed for certain malpractices. But his knowledge of anatomy comes in handy for producing the most unendurable pain. Let me warn you, Kirk can be very persuasive when people are uncooperative."

Kirk said, "You boil it down and what he means is, if you don't do precisely as I tell you, why then I'm going to bend your pretty bones until you scream."

"I think you would," said Andrea. "You have the eyes of a reptile."

"Now, Andrea," Kirk continued without a twitch of expression, "we are going to put you on the phone to your husband tomorrow." He took her hand in his and held it out for inspection. "And if he doesn't come up with the money, or if he calls the cops, then we'll have to amputate this little fellow and mail it to him, rings and all. Remember that, Andrea. And when you talk to old Stan, make it very convincing. Otherwise, you'll keep losing bits and pieces of yourself, you see?"

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Andrea read in his gaze the twisted craving of the sadist in search of a victim, and the last, brave little flame of her resistance flickered out.

"All right," she answered, "I'll convince him."

In what must have been morning, Claire Vanderhoff brought her breakfast and went away quickly, not once looking Andrea in the eye. Well, at least Claire had *some* sense of guilt. Or did she?

Nita brought her a sandwich and a glass of milk for lunch, looking not at all like the timid maid who had served Andrea when she came to dinner with Stan. She was now brazen, mocking.

Several hours later they all entered her cell, Kirk bearing a portable extension phone which he plugged into a jack in the wall beneath the table.

Kirk warned her that the penalty for any attempt to blurt the information that she was being held next door at the Vanderhoffs was instant death—and backed the threat with a knife poised at her throat. Then he dialed their number and began talking to Stan in that crooning voice with just the barest trace of an accent. It was so marvelously underplayed and so totally real that she asked about it after she had that wretched excuse for a conversation with poor, dear Stan, and was disconnected in midsentence. She realized that every scrap of knowledge gleaned might aid the police later.

Kirk told her quite proudly that he had spent some time in Mexico, where he was running dope across the border to the U.S. He had been working with a Mexican who spoke flawless English, but for that subtle overtone of inflection, and he had made a study of his odd patterns of speech.

That one-sided exchange with Stan completed, they took the phone away and left her with the aftereffects, a smothering depression. Shortly, Nita came again with dinner, but Andrea had no appetite and could get down only a few morsels.

A very long time had passed and now it was probably well into the next day. The million must have been delivered by Stan and she should have been released hours ago but, on the contrary, they had not even brought her breakfast.

Now she was frightened, overcome by the first real doubt that she would ever see Stan again.

Kirk had flown back from San Francisco with the suitcase, arriving at

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the house shortly before dawn. Dwight Vanderhoff had not gone to the office but had phoned in sick. The million had been counted and divided and now the quartet were discussing their triumph.

"It's fantastic," Dwight was saying as he leaned toward them across the desk, his eyes feverish with excitement. "To the last piece, it all falls right into place—a work of genius."

"I thank you," Kirk said with a little bow, for he had conceived the plan and wanted full credit.

"What I mean," said Dwight, "is the beauty of the way it all follows through, like a ball launched with perfect form and timing and placement. Your common criminal, if he could, in his wildest dreams, pull one like this, would be at a loss to know what to do with the money. He couldn't spend it freely because he would be the immediate object of suspicion. On the other hand, if a Vanderhoff lives in the most lavish style, it's only what's expected of him. Don't you see?"

"I see very well," said Kirk. "But it's not quite so simple. You must go on for some time in the ridiculous role of the Vanderhoff shipping magnate, and we must play the much less delightful parts of being your servants. Though I assure you, when the time is right, we'll be gone in a hurry. Right, Nita?"

"Betcha life," said Nita. "I wasn't born to be a flunky."

"You all sound so jolly," said Claire Vanderhoff. "I love money, too. Oh, yes, dearly; but we still have to dispose of Andrea and I'm in no mood for celebration just now. Please, Kirk, are you positive there isn't another way?"

"Sure, we'll let her go home and spill the beans to daddy," he sneered. "Or maybe you believe we actually *could* hide out somewhere, some splendid place where we'd never be found. Like with the natives in the jungles of Africa."

"I think we should reconsider my plan to keep her walled up in that room," Dwight said.

"Nonsense!" Kirk shook his head. "For how long? Fifty, sixty years, until she dies of old age? Besides, the area will soon be swarming with cops, and there's always a slim chance that they might uncover the trail. If the least clue sent them here, Tillman would push with all his money and power until they tore this place apart. Sure, it's a seemingly foolproof hiding place, but they have all sorts of technical skill and equipment to uncover a secret room, once they've got the scent."

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"C'mon now, Kirk," Dwight said. "Do you honestly believe they'd ever be able to figure this one in a hundred years?"

"No," Kirk said, "I don't think so. But if there's one chance in a thousand, I'm not gonna take it. Listen, it's all set up with my boy at the crematory, and it can't go wrong. He thinks I'm still running dope and have to get rid of a female fink. Tonight I slip him five grand and a body wrapped in a blanket. He doesn't look at the body and he burns it face-down. That's the agreement. No questions.

"While I stand by to see that the job is done, he puts in a little overtime and—presto!—what's left of Andrea you could stick in your pocket. Then we restore her little prison to its former innocence, just another room. Now, that's the way we planned it, and that's the way it's going to be, kiddies."

There was a heavy silence. Then Dwight said, "All right, I suppose it has to be done. You handle it, Kirk—and spare us the details."

"Nothing to it," Kirk said. "Nita will take the condemned a hearty last meal. I'll lace the coffee with a nice little potion for permanent sleep. Andrea will doze off quietly and she'll never feel the heat."

Just after midnight, Kirk carried the blanket-shrouded body out of the house to the Vanderhoff garage and deposited it inside the trunk of the black limousine. Then he wheeled off silently, drifting far below the Tillman place before cutting in his lights. Down on Sunset, he picked up the freeway and drove south carefully, his speed moderate. Even at so late an hour there was considerable traffic and a few patrol cars were cruising about.

In a while he slid down an off-ramp to a main thoroughfare and went south again until he came upon the squat building of the mortuary. It was dark, but for a neon sign discreetly advertising death.

Kirk entered the driveway and drove to the rear, where he braked beside a separate building, doused his lights and left the limousine. He crossed to a door and jabbed a bell-button repeatedly, using a coded signal. The door opened narrowly with a dim splash of light, and then he was swallowed inside.

Another five minutes passed before Kirk returned with a man who toted a canvas stretcher. Kirk opened the trunk and the two men shared the burden of the body, lowering it, then carting it off on the stretcher, their movements outlined for a moment in the soft glow from the open doorway.

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Just then, thrusting a .45 automatic, Fred Hammond stepped from the shadows into their path. "Hold it right there, gentlemen," he said, as Stanford Tillman materialized abruptly at his side. "Now, ease the stretcher down, raise your hands and lean forward against that wall!"

Hammond searched the pair but found no weapons; Tillman frantically unwound the blanket. Andrea seemed pale enough to be very dead—but wasn't. There was a slow, steady pulse, and with a moan of relief, Stan gathered her into his arms.

It was nearly dawn; the Vanderhoffs and their accomplices were in custody. The police had gone, taking with them for evidence a tape recording of traffic and ship sounds used to deceive Tillman, and the sum of one million dollars paid in ransom. Andrea was lying on the sofa in the Tillman living room. Tillman and Fred Hammond sat in facing chairs.

Andrea took a sip of her coffee and said cheerfully, "Ahh, this is good! I like mine with cream and sugar, no drugs, thank you. Maybe it was something in Nita's expression that warned me—or is it only that she makes rotten coffee? Anyway, it had a rather odd flavor, and after a swallow or two I was suspicious. So I poured the rest down the drain. Then I fell into a deep sleep. But not forever, as planned."

"Thank God!" Stan Tillman sighed and solemnly shook his head.

"And now that there's time for details, what's *your* story, Fred?" asked Andrea. "Are you psychic? How in heaven did you figure that I was held here, right next door?"

Hammond smiled. "Well, I knew it couldn't be done without inside information," he answered, "and I was already thinking along those lines. But I'm afraid the rest was mostly luck, Mrs. Tillman. I was worried, had a feeling they would never let you go, and I couldn't sleep. Near five yesterday morning I got up and began to wander over the grounds, thinking, thinking. I was right by the hedge on the Vanderhoff side when that creep, Kirk Pardo, drove in.

"I heard voices, soft but excited. So I peeked through the hedge. In the moonlight, I saw the Vanderhoffs and the maid, Nita. They were gathered around Kirk, who was taking a suitcase from the trunk of the limo. I got only a glimpse before the garage door closed. But I thought it was mighty strange for Mr. and Mrs. Vanderhoff to be dressed and about at that hour and cozy with the hired help, everyone fired up over a suitcase.

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"I began to try it on for size, putting the pieces together in my mind. It was wild—but possible. I went to Mr. Tillman with it, and together we kept a constant watch on the Vanderhoff place through binoculars. When Kirk sneaked off in the limo at midnight, we tailed him, part of the way with lights out.

"And here we are, Mrs. Tillman, all safe and sound."

Andrea said, "Dear Fred, I hope you know that you have all our love and gratitude. But I believe we owe you something more tangible. Don't you, Stan?"

"Yes, indeed we do," said Tillman, who was gazing fondly at Hammond. "Fred, I'd like to make you a present of some shares in each of the Tillman companies. You'll have enough to make you independent for life." He sighed, "And I suppose that means I'll lose you."

"No chance of that, Mr. Tillman." Hammond grinned. "A Tillman stockholder is kinda like a member of the family. And families should stick together, don't you think?"

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Suggestion of Murder

by Clayton Matthews

At first Kathy Hollister thought she was dreaming again. For several months she'd been having recurring nightmares in which someone had been trying to kill her. Moments before, she'd heard a telephone ringing somewhere in the apartment. The sound of the phone ringing always seemed to trigger this particular nightmare.

As in the other dreams, a menacing figure was approaching her bed. In the first dream the figure had just come through the bedroom door when she'd awakened and there had been no one there. In each succeeding nightmare the figure had made it a step or two closer before Kathy awoke. In the dark she couldn't make out any distinguishing features. She only knew it was a man and hauntingly familiar.

This time the figure reached the bed and came down on his knees, hands reaching for her throat.

Kathy screamed piercingly.

It wasn't a dream! She was awake and it was all too real. She screamed again and beat with her fists at the figure looming over her.

She heard a soft, groaning sound and the figure drew back to sag down onto the edge of the bed, face falling into cupped hands.

Summoning up her courage, Kathy reached over and flipped on the bedside lamp. She gasped. "Lee! It's you!"

Her husband raised a haggard face.

"Lee, you tried to kill me!"

Lee's black eyes were tortured, his sensitive mouth twisted horribly out of shape. He said wretchedly, "I know. Kathy, you think I don't know!"

Gregory Zeno listened quietly, slender hands folded in his lap, as Kathy Hollister poured out her story. Listening was one of his best talents. Zeno was a slender man in his mid-thirties, with a shock of white hair, a face

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round and innocent as a babe's, and pale grey eyes with a deceptively sleepy look about them.

They were in his study in the Westwood highrise apartment, a large apartment with modernistic furniture and vivid paintings on the walls. One wall of the study was all glass, letting the afternoon sun pour in. Zeno had been amused, as always, as he watched Kathy try to conceal her surprise at the apartment. Most people associated the occult with darkness and shadow and expected the abode of an occult investigator to have cabalistic signs all about, perhaps a witch's broom in one corner swathed with cobwebs.

For a moment after Kathy had finished her story, Zeno observed her without speaking. She was dark, slender, very intense. Despite her obvious nervousness, he detected a strength of character about her that intrigued him. He'd listened to a great many stories with paranormal overtones, and most of them he took with a grain of skepticism, yet he suspected it wasn't so easy to send Kathy Hollister into a flap.

With a nervous laugh she said, "I guess you think I'm a dingy!"

Zeno shook his head, smiling.

"Then you think it *is* possible Lee has been hypnotized and given a command to kill me without his even knowing about it?"

"Anything is possible, Kathy. If I've learned nothing else, I've learned that much. However, hypnotism is a little out of my field. Back in the days of Mesmerism—named after Anton Mesmer—hypnotism was considered an occult science. Since then it has become more respectable. It's accepted today, and rightly so, as a useful tool in psychiatry, dentistry, even surgery, but there's still a dark area of mysticism surrounding it. No, I don't think you're dingy. To ask how much credence I put in your story, that's a different matter. To sum up, you believe that a hypnotist, one neither you nor your husband can name, placed him in a trance and planted a posthypnotic suggestion, or command, to kill you. Is that about it?"

"That's it! Sounds kooky put that way but that's it!"

"One thing occurs to me. If our unknown hypnotist, Mr. X, Y, or Z, *has* planted this suggestion, he must have a reason, a motive. Can you think of one? Like do you have money your husband will inherit upon your death?"

She looked startled. "Money? No, not a smidgen. Anyway, Lee wouldn't— Oh, I see what you mean."

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Zeno was nodding. "Yes. If your hypnotist could get your husband to murder you, it would be simple enough for him to get control of any money."

"Well, there isn't any. I work. Lee's an actor, you see, and quite good. But it takes time and luck. He works in television and movies and someday he'll be a star, I know he will! He's a very good mimic and imitates the voices of famous people. Meanwhile, we manage on what he makes and my salary." She laughed shakily. "Money! Heavens, I don't even have relatives, only my Aunt Agatha whom I haven't heard from in years. I doubt she even has my address. We've moved so much since I married Lee."

Zeno was thinking hard, only a small part of his attention engaged with her. It wasn't the type of case that usually interested him. He was primarily a psychic investigator. Zeno's father had been killed in a hunting accident when the boy was ten. His grief-stricken mother went from medium to medium seeking contact with her dead husband. Finally she found one who promised to help her communicate. A voice supposed to be that of Zeno's father begged his wife to join him on the other side, and she had committed suicide. That was when Zeno's interest in the occult began, a search for concrete proof of psychic phenomena. So far he had found none, uncovering a number of frauds in the process. Yet he continued to probe. Until the question was resolved, he would never know whether or not his mother's death had been the result of a fraud practiced on her.

Something of his thoughts must have shown on his face, for Kathy said in dismay, "You're not taking the case!"

"On the contrary, I am taking it," Zeno assured her quickly.

Later, Zeno knew that his motive in burdening himself with her problem lay not in any particular interest in it as such—at that point he was almost convinced she was wrong in her theory—but in Kathy herself. Although she struck him as being particularly self-reliant, there was something about her that conveyed to him an unspoken plea for help.

Kathy sighed. "Usually I can cope but this time I feel so—damned helpless!" Her color heightened. "There's just nothing I can grasp. I read a great deal, but I don't like fantasy, there's no logic, no pattern, no handle I can catch and hold!"

"I know." He had to grin. "We'll see if we can't find a handle for you."

"Mr. Zeno?"

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"Yes, Kathy?"

"Is it—" She hesitated. "Is it possible, this posthypnotic command to kill someone? I thought people couldn't be made to do things against their nature through hypnosis? Like commit crimes?"

"There are precedents, Kathy. There was a case in Copenhagen, for example, where a man committed a number of bank robberies. The man was finally arrested. He swore he didn't rob the banks, had no knowledge of them whatsoever. Extensive investigation disclosed that he had once shared a cell in prison with another man who was an amateur hypnotist. The hypnotist placed him in a trance innumerable times. The letter X was used as a trigger signal. When the pair got out of prison, the hypnotist would send the subject a letter beginning with the letter X. This would instantly place the subject in a deep trance, and the body of the letter held instructions for the planned robbery. The subject would then carry out the crime and turn the proceeds over to the criminal hypnotist, afterward remembering nothing at all about the robbery. So, you see, it is possible. All of us have certain dark urges within ourselves which we normally manage to keep under control; but hypnosis may release these urges and an unscrupulous hypnotist could easily take advantage of this."

Lee Hollister was blond, lean, his blue eyes guarded. He seemed cordial enough, yet Zeno sensed a certain hostility in his manner. This came into the open when Zeno began questioning him.

"I'm not sure I'm in favor of this!" he protested. "What are you, some kind of private eye? What is it they charge, a hundred a day and expenses?"

"Lee, please," Kathy said. "We agreed we have to have help. And Mr. Zeno isn't a private eye."

"That's right, Mr. Hollister. If I'm anything, I'm a psychic investigator. You'll only be billed for my expenses initially. If I solve your—problem—my fee will be one thousand dollars."

"What's psychic about what's happened to me? You think—" Hollister laughed harshly. "Do you think some ghost is trying to get me to kill Kathy?"

"That's what we're trying to discover. Can you tell me when it began, when you first attempted to kill your wife?"

"So far as I can tell, it started about six months ago, when I decided I had to stop smoking."

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Zeno's interest quickened. "When you decided to stop smoking? That seems a rather odd way of dating something."

"Well, I was a chain smoker. I tried everything to stop. Nothing worked." Hollister's hands were laced together in his lap. Soft music came from a cassette player in one corner of the room. "I read a book on hypnotism, about how there had been some success with using hypnosis to stop smoking."

"But you stopped all by yourself, darling," Kathy said proudly.

"That's just it, Kathy. I'm not sure I did stop all by myself."

"You're not sure?" Kathy said in astonishment. "How can you *not* be sure?"

"I may have gone to a hypnotist. I don't really know. We've discussed this already. Suppose I went to a hypnotist and he gave me a posthypnotic suggestion to forget about him, forget about even going to a hypnotist?" Hollister glanced at Zeno almost pleadingly. "Is that possible?"

Zeno nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, it's possible. But you *did* stop smoking after that? Without really knowing how or why?"

"Yes, I stopped completely."

Zeno said, "You say you may have considered a hypnotist. I don't suppose you have any idea as to whom?"

"How can I when I don't even know if I saw one?"

"Darling, I remember!" Kathy jumped up.

Her husband stared at her, open-mouthed. "You do?"

"Yes! We saw an ad in the paper and I tore it out and tucked it away in the desk. I forgot about it since you didn't mention it again. It's probably still there."

She hurried out of the room and came back in a moment with a clipped newspaper advertisement. She gave it to Zeno. He read: *Marcus Blake, Hypnotist. Wish to stop smoking? Other emotional problems also solved by experienced hypnotist*. He glanced at Hollister. "Strike a chord?"

Hollister said, "It means absolutely nothing to me. I don't even remember seeing it."

Zeno tucked the ad into his briefcase. "I'll look into it, see what I can come up with. Can either of you remember anything else I should know?"

Hollister shook his head. Kathy was frowning. "There's something—It's just on the edge of my mind." She squeezed her eyes shut. "I know! It may not mean a thing, may just be something I dreamed, but every

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time I've had this horrible nightmare, or what I thought was a nightmare, I've heard a telephone ring somewhere far off. Does that mean anything?"

"It could be the signal, the trigger sign like the letter X I told you about. Mean anything to you, Lee?"

Frowning, Hollister shook his head.

"Not a thing, I'm sorry."

Zeno zipped his case shut. "If it *is* a trigger sign to activate any post-hypnotic suggestion, you naturally wouldn't remember."

The address from the ad was an arcade building on a shabby side street just off Sunset Boulevard. Marcus Blake, Hypnotist, was listed on the building directory, but the small office was empty, the scant furniture seen through the window dust-covered. As Zeno started to turn away, a portly, grey-haired man approached him from the rear of the arcade.

"Looking for an office for rent?" the man asked in a booming voice. "I'm the rental agent here."

"No, I'm looking for the hypnotist, Marcus Blake."

The rental agent made a face. "That kook! I guess he couldn't hack it. Anyway, he just up and left one day, owing a month's rent. Haven't seen hide nor hair since."

"When was that?"

The man tilted his head. "Oh, about six months back."

Around the time Lee Hollister considered seeing a hypnotist, Zeno thought. He said, "I don't suppose you'd have his home address? Or maybe a forwarding address?"

"The kook didn't leave a forwarding address." The agent snorted. "As for a home address, never gave me one. Ask me, I think he lived out of a suitcase. Man like that, I should never have rented to him."

Clearly the rental agent was curious, but Zeno left quickly without enlightening him. He spent the rest of the day in a futile search for Marcus Blake. Professional hypnotists do not need to be licensed, and they have no organization as such. Zeno knew in advance that most of them were a seedy lot, some little more than charlatans. Yet many were legitimate enough, at least in purpose. It was soon evident that Marcus Blake was not, and his reputation wasn't good.

"Blake will do anything for a buck," a hypnotist friend of Zeno's, Derek Bond, told him. "He's not even a good hypnotist."

"But he *could* put somebody in a trance?"

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"Oh, he could do that. He was a stage hypnotist for a few years, you know the kind of thing. He could put people under and get them to perform for laughs. But he has such a repellent personality he couldn't even cut that for long."

"Then you'd say he's not above using hypnosis for criminal purposes?"

Derek Bond shrugged. "If there's money in it, Blake's not above doing it."

It was, on the whole, an unsatisfactory day, and Zeno had little that was encouraging to report to the Hollisters.

"I want to try something, Lee. I'd like to put you in a trance. There's a chance we might dig out of you what happened."

"Now, wait a minute!" Hollister drew back. "That's what got me into this in the first place!"

"Hypnosis could unlock your memory cells, free you of any post-hypnotic command to forget your being hypnotized and the hypnotist. It's the only chance we have as I see it."

It was Kathy who finally convinced her husband. "Darling, we have to do something. We can't go on this way."

Hollister glanced at Zeno with a resigned shrug. "All right, I'm in your hands."

"I'll call in a friend, an experienced hypnotist."

The next morning Zeno came with Derek Bond. Zeno had briefed him on the situation.

Bond seated Hollister on the couch, saying, "Now you must relax, Lee. You must be completely relaxed." He stood before him, speaking in a soft, droning monotone. "Allow your body to go completely limp. Eyes closed. Now relax. Start with your toes and work up. Let all the tension drain out of them. Now your feet. Your legs and knee joints—limp, limp and relaxed—"

In a short while Hollister sat with his eyes closed, head drooping, hands lying limply on his thighs.

Bond took a wooden match from his pocket. "Now I'm going to jab a pin into your hand, Lee."

Bond pressed the end of the match against the back of Hollister's hand. Hollister flinched and cried out.

Satisfied that his subject was in a deep trance, Bond began questioning him, starting back at the time the decision was made to quit smoking,

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then taking him through all the agonizing attempts and failures. "Now, Lee, you realized you couldn't stop without help, so you decided to consult a hypnotist. Is that correct?"

Heretofore Hollister's answers had been prompt, precise. For the first time he seemed to hesitate, his head rotating on his shoulders. His eyelids quivered, as though trying to open. He said slowly, "Yes—couldn't stop without help—"

"And you went to a hypnotist?"

"I—I—"

"Who, Lee? Who was it?"

Hollister's right knee jerked, his hands flopped about in his lap. "I—don't know."

"You consulted a hypnotist, Lee! Now who?"

"Don't know—"

Bond's voice sharpened. "Tell us, Lee. Was his name Marcus Blake?"

Hollister groaned as though in pain, flinching away from the prod of Bond's voice. "No! I don't—" He half leaped from the couch, his eyes opened. For a moment he remained suspended there, as though about to flee. Kathy started to her feet and Zeno motioned her still.

Bond turned to Zeno, spreading his hands. "That's about it, Greg."

Hollister's eyes cleared and he sat down. He passed a hand over his face. "What happened? Was I in a trance? Did I say anything to help?"

"Yes, you were in a trance." Zeno sighed. "And no, you didn't help us."

"But why, Mr. Zeno?" Kathy said in dismay. "Why couldn't he tell us?"

Zeno sighed again. "Apparently our hypnotist is clever, covering every eventuality. Probably he gave a posthypnotic suggestion in case Lee was ever questioned about it under hypnosis, that the trance would immediately terminate."

Her shoulders slumped. "It's hopeless, isn't it?"

"I'm not giving up, Kathy. There's still a chance I may locate Blake. Derek here has put out the word that I'm looking for him—"

"Mr. Zeno," Hollister broke in, "in view of what's happened and what *may* happen, maybe I should move out, stay somewhere else until it's settled one way or another."

"That might not be a bad idea."

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"No!" Kathy cried. "I won't have it! You're my husband and you're staying right here where you belong!"

"But, Kathy, it might be dangerous for you," Hollister said.

"I don't care! I'm not that afraid." Her lips set stubbornly. "Besides, I don't believe it's in you to harm me, no matter what crazy things may have been planted in your head."

Zeno, recognizing anew the steel in her, knew it would be a waste of words to argue with her. Foolish she might be, yet he was forced to admire her for it.

Early that evening the telephone rang in Zeno's apartment.

"Greg? Derek. I think I know where your Marcus Blake is. I just got a tip. Evidently he's spooked, on the run. But maybe if you hurry, you might catch him. He's at—"

The address was close to downtown. Zeno left quickly, was at the address within thirty minutes. It was in a run-down section, a dilapidated apartment building just off Pico. The building smelled of cooked food and spilled wine. Blake's room was on the second floor.

Zeno rapped on the door and called Blake's name. There was no response. He knocked again, then tried the door. It was unlocked. He went in.

The only light came from another room off to the left. The room Zeno was in held old, worn furniture, a Murphy bed, unmade.

Marcus Blake was in the other room, face down across an ancient typewriter on the kitchen table. He was tall, skinny, balding, about fifty—and quite dead. On the floor beside one dangling hand was a .38 revolver. There was a gaping hole through the back of his head. His flesh was cold to the touch as Zeno raised his head from the typewriter. There was a note in the machine:

"It's too much. I thought I could go through with it, but it's too much. In the beginning it was a game, to see how far I could go, to see if I could really control someone, but it's gotten out of hand. What if he really kills her? The police will place the legal blame on me, even though it's Hollister's hands around his wife's neck. I don't even dare hypnotize him again and remove the command to kill. If he learns the truth, he'll probably kill me. This time I've really gone too far—"

There was an unintelligible scribble at the bottom of the note that could have been a signature.

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Gently Zeno let Blake's head fall back. He stood for a long time, scrubbing a hand back and forth across his mouth, deep in thought.

There wasn't a telephone in the apartment. Zeno used the pay phone in the hall to report finding Blake's body to the police. He glanced at his watch. It was late, edging toward midnight. He called Derek Bond.

Kathy was deep in the nightmare again, the menacing figure approaching her bed. She tried to stem her rising terror, knowing it was just a dream like all the others.

Then she remembered they weren't dreams—and there was something wrong, something that was missing, an integral part of the other dreams. She snapped fully awake.

The figure was on the bed, astride her prone body, hands already locked around her throat, closing like a vise.

She screamed. "Lee! It's me, Kathy! Don't—"

The hands squeezed, and her voice and all air was shut off. She thrashed, she beat at him with her fists, all to no avail. The hands tightened, tightened again. Her lungs seemed about to burst. Bright lights splashed across her eyelids, then blackness rolled over her in a smothering wave.

Suddenly the room blazed with light, and the killing hands were torn from her throat.

Kathy sat up, dazedly observing Lee struggling in the grasp of Gregory Zeno. Then Lee went limp, all resistance leaving him. He shook his head, gazing around the room dully, finally focusing on Kathy. He took a step toward her. "Are you all right, Kathy?"

She nodded wordlessly, too dazed to speak.

He glanced around at Zeno. "I don't remember—but I guess you got here just in time."

Zeno said, "Just in time."

"But how did you get in?" Kathy demanded.

"Forced the door, no other way. I'm afraid you'll have to replace the lock."

"No problem." Lee gestured absently. "But how did you know that—"

"Certain things didn't fit. Or, better yet, some things fell into place."

"Now I remember!" Kathy leaped out of bed and reached for her robe without embarrassment. "There was something different about this time!"

Both men stared at her intently.

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Zeno said, "What, Kathy?"

"The phone! I didn't hear it ring before Lee came in."

"It didn't. There was no need for it this time."

Kathy stared. "I don't understand."

"This time you were supposed to die, so the ringing phone, supposed to be the trigger signal, wasn't necessary."

"Wasn't— What are you saying?"

"I'm saying—" Zeno hesitated, sighing, then strode to the door, calling out, "Sergeant, have you found it yet?"

A plump, middle-aged man appeared in the doorway, both hands filled with cassettes. He looked harried. "Not yet, Mr. Zeno. There are at least fifty of these things."

"It doesn't matter. You'll find it unless he destroyed it and I very much doubt he has yet."

Kathy stamped her foot. "Destroyed *what?*"

"Yes, what is this all about?" Lee asked hoarsely. "What right have you—"

"A cassette with a recorded phone ringing three times, the supposed trigger signal. Your husband played it each time in his progressive attempts to kill you, Kathy."

In her bewilderment Kathy felt her temper begin to fray. "I'm not sure I like what you're trying to say."

"I don't like it either, but I'm afraid it's all too true," Zeno said grimly. "I found Marcus Blake tonight, Kathy. He was dead, an apparent suicide, a note in his typewriter taking the blame for hypnotizing your husband into killing you."

"Well?" Kathy demanded.

"It wasn't suicide, Kathy. It was murder. The tip about Blake's whereabouts supposedly came from my hypnotist friend, Derek Bond. But Derek never called me. Your husband did, imitating Derek's voice. He killed Marcus Blake, arranging it to look like suicide. Tonight, he would have killed you if I hadn't recognized the truth in time, and ultimate blame would have rested on Blake."

Kathy glanced at Lee. He was pale and still. In a faltering voice she said, "I don't believe you!"

"He planned it from the beginning, rather ingeniously, even down to stopping smoking. He never went to a hypnotist, Kathy. Oh, he knew about Blake, may even have consulted him on some pretext or other, but

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he was never hypnotized. He hoped to kill you and eventually get off, claiming he was under Blake's absolute control all the while. And it may well have worked. There have been other cases, the hypnotist convicted instead of his subject, but I don't recall a case of murder." Zeno looked thoughtful. "It would have been interesting to see how it came out. But that's all academic now. Im sure the police will find little difficulty proving Lee killed Marcus Blake."

"But why?" Kathy cried. "Lee has no earthly reason to kill *me*!"

"Yes, he does, Kathy, the best reason in the world. For money."

"What money? I told you, there *is* no money!"

"Your Aunt Agatha died several months ago. She was worth a half-million dollars, Kathy, and it all comes to you, or to Lee if you're dead. On a hunch I called there this afternoon, and the lawyers for her estate have been trying to locate you. They said a letter was sent after her death to your last known address and never returned. I think your husband intercepted that letter, perhaps inadvertently, and decided then and there to kill you."

Kathy turned a stricken face to Lee. "Lee, is this all true?"

Lee refused to meet her gaze.

The police sergeant stepped up alongside and took his arm. "Come along, Mr. Hollister."

Lee allowed himself to be led from the room. Kathy took two short steps after him, then stopped, blinking against the sting of tears.

"I've heard of smokers taking drastic measures to quit," Zeno said as though talking to himself, "but stopping as part of a murder plan is doing it the hard way!"

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That'll Never Happen No More

by Ron Goulart

"Stupid jerk," he said, grabbing the sandy volleyball which had just slammed into his chest, and hurling it in the direction of the ocean.

A hairy boy came striding across the bright yellow sand. "What'd you do that for, buddy? We didn't—"

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Grady Thorne strode to meet the young man. "Throwing your damn—"

Thorne was grabbed from behind. "Calm down. We don't want attention."

Thorne shuffled his feet on the warm sand. He was a middle-sized, wide-shouldered man of thirty-two, in good shape for someone who spent most of his working time indoors. "Yeah, you're right, Buzz," he said. "Sorry."

Buzz Klinger, a year younger and five inches taller than his friend, stepped ahead of Thorne, who was holding a knobby hand out toward the hairy young man. "Let's forget about the whole thing," Buzz suggested, grinning.

"I don't see why he—" The young man gestured at the bright blue Pacific where the ball was bobbing in the surf.

"Sorry," said Thorne. He turned away, returning to the blanket where he and Buzz had been sitting and planning their next robbery.

They'd selected a scrubby stretch of beach where there weren't any other nearby bathers that Sunday. The unexpected volleyball had been the first intrusion in their quiet conversation.

Buzz said, "Let's get back to what—"

"I'm really going to get hold of myself," promised Thorne as he squatted on the blanket. "It's stupid to lose my temper like that."

Buzz grinned. He hummed the first line of an old folk song, *That'll Never Happen No More*, a favorite of his.

"Okay, okay," admitted Thorne. "I know I've said the same thing be-

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fore, but I have a feeling . . . I mean, one or two more jobs and the pressure will be off me. Maybe Amanda will settle down, too."

"You still think she—"

"Yeah, I know she's seeing somebody else." Thorne poked his thumb into the sand. "I guess our life at the moment isn't what she expected. Well, I didn't imagine five years ago I'd still be working in a bookstore when I was thirty-two."

"A high-class, rare bookstore," reminded Buzz. "With a lot of very posh customers. Like this Kenneth Ivey you were telling me about."

Nodding, Thorne said, "I was up at Ivey's place last week, delivering an order of rare books to him. He's a set designer, you know, and he's got an enormous house up in the Palisades. Lives by himself, except for a sweet young butler-valet."

"What's this collection of his?"

"Ivey collects commemorative plates, gold and silver plates celebrating the winning of the West or the wedding anniversary of the Queen of Rumania and similar memorable occasions," continued Thorne. "He's got about five hundred of the damn things."

"Worth how much?"

"At least a half million, I'd estimate. I've already contacted a fence, through some of my store connections, who specializes in this kind of stuff. He'll give us $80,000."

"That's a pretty small piece of half a million," Buzz pointed out.

"It's $40,000 each, for a few hours' work."

Grinning, Buzz said, "True, it's more than I make in a whole week at Ulrich's Foreign Motors in Westwood. Still, I think we could get a hundred thou if we pushed the guy."

Thorne's lips pressed together. "Don't be a stupid jerk, Buzz. I need that money. If you—" He started to get up.

"You're supposed to be practicing control, remember?" Buzz pushed him back down with a hand on his shoulder. "Take it easy."

Thorne didn't answer. He turned away, watching the ocean. Far out, nearly at the horizon, white sailboats were slicing by.

"Okay," Buzz said. "I'll settle for $40,000. Now, how do we—"

"I'm sorry," Thorne said. "It's just that I'm tired of living on $9,000 a year. And Amanda's getting tired of me. Like tonight, she claims she's going to a lecture on primal psychology in Santa Monica."

"Maybe she is."

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"Sure, maybe." Thorne sighed, digging at the sand with his thumb again. "Ivey showed me his collection. He's got it in cases in a big room on the ground floor of his place."

"With a burglar-alarm system," Buzz said, "to protect it."

"It's a primitive alarm setup, I don't know what some of these guys can be thinking about. All we have to do is cut his electric feed lines and the system goes blooey."

"The cops won't get an automatic warning?"

"Nope. I checked the whole thing out while Ivey was showing me his gardens. He's also a flower nut."

"Those he can keep." Buzz locked his hands over his knees. "When can we hit the place?"

"Next Wednesday or Thursday night."

"Why then?" Buzz asked him.

"Ivey and the sweet-face valet are going down to Palm Springs for a couple days. Place will be empty. Ivey's counting on his stupid alarm system to look after everything."

"Let's make it Thursday," said Buzz. "I've got a date for Wednesday."

"For $40,000 you can skip a date."

"If we do it Thursday I can have the girl and the forty thou, too."

"Okay, Thursday, then. We'll get together once more before then and work out the final details," Thorne said. "Oh, do you want to have dinner tonight? Amanda's going to be out, and—"

"Not tonight. I've got something else planned. Maybe tomorrow after work we can get together. I'll phone you at the bookstore." Buzz grinned. "Try to keep calm until we pull this one off. Okay?"

"Don't worry. I feel good about this job. When I feel good I don't have any trouble with my temper."

Buzz hummed the song again.

Thorne slammed down the phone. He shoved the instrument across the phone table until it smacked into the wall of the apartment. "Stupid jerk. Doesn't she have any imagination when it comes to lying? That Wednesday night series of concerts at UCLA ended two weeks ago."

He stalked into the living room, which looked out on the apartment-complex parking lot. There was a hot, dry wind blowing tonight and it swept drive-in discards of paper cups and plates and crumpled cigarette packs across the pitted asphalt. Thorne kicked a hassock. "Damn it," he

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said. "She couldn't have been where she said she was last night." He kicked out at the coffee table, sending a cascade of magazines and ash trays to the floor.

Three thumps sounded from beneath the floor. It was old Glover, protesting the noise.

"Stupid jerk," muttered Thorne. He took a deep, angry breath.

After stomping around the floor a few minutes longer, ignoring old Glover's thumps, Thorne got control of himself. "This is the night of the job. I've got to hold my temper." He slowed, then stopped.

Bending and gathering up the debris from the coffee table, he noticed a brand-new matchbook. On its cover, in silver letters, was printed: *Why Not?*

Thorne straightened. His fingers tightened around the book of matches. "That's that club down in San Amaro," he said. "Hangout for swingers. Amanda and I have never been to a place like that. In fact, we haven't even been in San Amaro for over a year." His hand turned into a fist. He jammed the match folder into his pocket. "At least I haven't."

This, though, was the night of the raid on Kenneth Ivey's plate collection, and Thorne had promised himself he'd keep his temper under control. The job tonight would net him $40,000, more than he'd clear in years of working in the bookstore.

He knelt, took care of the rest of the mess. When Amanda came home fifteen minutes later he was able to smile at her, kiss her gently on the cheek. He brought it off very well. She never sensed his anger.

The hot dry wind brushed at the big silent house, rattling and twisting the ivy. The decorative green shutters ticked, dead leaves spun down out of the trees to go skittering across the moonlit flagstones of the patio.

They'd cut the necessary wires five minutes ago. Now the two men were cautiously approaching the back of Ivey's home. The dark house was empty. You could sense it.

Buzz eased up to a French window, tried the metal handle. "Locked," he said in a low voice. From a leather pouch hung around his neck he selected a pick.

In less than a minute he had the door standing open.

"The stuff is in the room across from this one." Thorne stepped across the threshold. Out of the pocket of his black windbreaker he drew a flashlight.

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He followed its circle of yellow across the rich Oriental rug and out into a shadowy corridor.

Buzz, carrying two black satchels, followed.

Pushing open a white door, Thorne said, "In here."

The room was large. Glass-doored trophy cases lined the walls. The gold and silver commemorative plates sparkled as the beam of the flashlight touched them.

Thorne started toward the nearest case. He bumped into a small table, nudging a heavy metal-based lamp to the floor. His flash got knocked from his gloved hand, rolled away across the floor, blinked off and went under one of the cases. "Damn it," he said.

Buzz set the satchels down.

"Here. Light a match and find it."

Grabbing the matchbook, Thorne tore one out and lit it. He took one step forward before stopping still. The matchbook cover said: *Why Not?* "You stupid jerk," he shouted. "That's why you couldn't do this job last night. That's why you weren't free Sunday night."

"Quiet down. What the hell are you talking about?"

Thorne made a groaning, snarling sound. He dropped the lighted match and it seemed to take long seconds to drift down to the rug. Grabbing up the heavy lamp, he charged at Buzz.

"Stupid jerk! It's been you and Amanda all this time. You just sat there while—"

"Hold off." Buzz backed across the dark room. "Suppose I have spent a little time with—"

"Suppose?" Thorne gave a roar and dived for his partner. He swung the lamp and hit Buzz against the side of the head. "You've been seeing her and seeing her." He hit him twice more, then once again.

Buzz moaned. He began to sway. The next blow of the lamp base knocked him sprawling to the floor.

Thorne followed him down through the darkness, hitting out with the lamp. "Well, that'll never happen no more, Buzz. No more."

When he realized Buzz was dead Thorne stood up.

"I wasn't supposed to lose my temper," he said. His feet hit the floor hard as he paced. "Now it's all fouled up. I won't get the $40,000 or . . . Wait a minute." His eyes were used to the room now. He located the two satchels. "Now it's going to be $80,000 for me alone, nothing for Buzz."

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He went to the first case, tried to open it. It was locked. "Buzz is the one who was good with locks." Thorne swung out with a gloved hand and smashed the glass.

Reaching in, he grabbed a gold plate, then another. He began to stuff them into a satchel.

There wouldn't be any trouble as long as he kept calm.

Thorne was driving Buzz's sports car along the coast highway. It was nearly midnight. In the trunk were the two bagfuls of gold and silver plates. He hadn't been able to cram the whole Ivey collection into the satchels, but he knew he had enough to net a profit of at least $50,000 for himself. Fifty thou, as Buzz would say.

Buzz was in the trunk, too, wrapped up in two big plastic garbage bags Thorne had found in the Ivey pantry. He'd had a tough time getting everything into the trunk. A little foreign car was a stupid thing to buy. The trunk door wouldn't shut right the first time and he'd had to shift Buzz around some, but there shouldn't be any trouble. He'd drive the car to the canyon where Buzz had his ramshackle cottage. There were several nice sharp curves along the rim of a gully there. Everybody knew Buzz liked to drive fast. So, he'd unwrap him, put him behind the wheel, and let him go over the cliff.

"First removing the gold and silver, of course," Thorne said.

He'd have a long talk with Amanda. He'd been meaning to do that anyway. Explain that he had all the money now and Buzz was dead. Knowing Amanda, he was fairly certain she'd choose to stay with him—even help him cook up an alibi for tonight, not that he'd probably need one.

There was still a lot of traffic on U.S. 1. Just as he was passing an open seaside restaurant, a gray sports car roared by on his left, cut suddenly in front of him and went squealing into the black parking lot.

"Stupid jerk!" Thorne's face glowed and he felt hot. "Could have killed me."

He swung the car off the road and drove toward the gray car. He stopped a few yards from the other vehicle, leaped out of his seat and went running toward the other driver. "You stupid jerk," he yelled. "You came damn near to smashing into—"

The man in the gray car was fat and had a bristly moustache. "Forgot to set your hand brake."

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"What?"

"You didn't put on your emergency brake when you stopped."

Thorne turned. Buzz' sports car was rolling, picking up speed as it headed down across the parking lot.

Thorne began chasing after the car.

It rolled faster and faster. Then it went slamming into a station wagon. The trunk lid popped open.

Buzz came falling out first. After him came one of the satchels. Its lock unsnapped and a single gold plate clanged to the ground.

"Stupid jerk," said Thorne.

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Family Code

by Lawrence Treat

When the wheels touched ground at Tokyo airport early that morning, I breathed a sigh of relief. I was in Japan. I was safe. He hadn't tried to stop me.

I don't know what I had expected. In my fitful sleep on the plane, I'd dreamed that he came down the aisle, knife in hand, looking for me. Awake, I'd worried about a possible bomb planted in the hold and I'd gazed around at the sleeping passengers and wanted to warn them and tell them not to blame me. I was as anxious to live as they were. I, Richard Corwin, had a wife I loved and I wanted desperately to get back to her.

And now we'd landed. No bomb. He hadn't followed me. He'd given up.

I'd hidden the painting between a couple of blueprints, pasted them together, and rolled them up. I had it with me, in my flight bag. The Customs men weren't looking for fifteenth-century Zen paintings. The examination would be cursory. I'd see Iwasa Yazawa, and hand him the treasure.

I felt almost confident of it. Takahito had tried to kill me, and he'd failed. He wouldn't try again.

I thought of that afternoon three days ago when he'd come to my apartment in San Francisco. I import Oriental art goods, and I'd done business with his father and been entertained in his house. I'd known Takahito as a boy, in his student's uniform, and years ago I'd talked to him about America and our different customs while his father smiled gently and approved. Travel was good, a youth should see the world and learn foreign ways. There were other ideas besides the Japanese, and it was useful to study them. And so Takahito had come to America.

Nevertheless, as he walked into my apartment carrying the black portfolio tucked under one arm, I had misgivings. Why hadn't his father

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written me? Why the surprise visit, without even a phone call? And why come here, to my home, instead of to my office?

Takahito's smile was pleasant, courteous—his manners were impeccable. I greeted him, offered him a chair, and asked how his father was and what he, Takahito was doing here.

"I come for education," he said. "American college."

"Oh," I said. To question him further would have been indelicate and, besides, I could guess the answers. Takahito, the son of a distinguished family, had been brought up in luxury and was destined to enroll at the University of Tokyo. But he disliked work, he was spoiled and lazy, and he must have failed his examinations. His father, rather than see him lose caste and attend a university of lesser standing, had sent him to study in the United States.

"College very expensive," Takahito said. "I wish to sell this." And he untied the ribbons of the portfolio and opened it.

I gasped. Yazawa Senior had shown me that painting two years ago. It was a landscape of the Ashikaga period, with delicate reeds in the foreground and the suggestion of a lake at the foot of high mountains. And even if I hadn't seen the painting before I would have recognized the subtle style and the beautiful brushwork of Saga Shubun, a master of the Chinese school.

"It's your father's," I said in a low, troubled voice. "It's registered as a national treasure, it's illegal to take it out of Japan. Takahito, you must return it."

"National treasure very valuable," he said, still smiling. "I not bring back."

"Then I will," I said.

"Please," he said quietly. "You make mistake."

"Hardly," I said. "Takahito, I think I know your mind. You're in revolt against the old traditions you were brought up in, you feel that the world has changed. You have some wild idea that by breaking with your father and trying to be independent you'll somehow be in step with the new Japan. But you're making a bad mistake. Unless you do what I tell you to, I'll call the police and you'll end up in jail."

"Mistake," he said, "is coming to you." And he grabbed at the portfolio.

I pushed him and he staggered back, wheeled, and charged at me. "I kill you!" he yelled. "You not tell police—I kill you!"

He picked up the heavy standing ashtray, swung it with all his strength,

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and sent it crashing at me. I grabbed up the coffee table for a shield and ducked. It shattered with the force of his blow, but he still had the ashtray and he raised it again and lashed out, swinging it like a golf club and driving me back into a corner of the room.

That was when Janet came back with the groceries. At the sight of Takahito she screamed, dropped her bundles, and threw a milk carton at him. She followed it up with a couple of grapefruit.

She missed, but the barrage was too much for him. He scooped up the portfolio, yelled one final phrase at me, and dashed out. He shoved Janet out of his way and raced past her, slamming the door behind him.

Janet rushed over to me. "Are you hurt?" she asked. "Are you hurt? Tell me—what happened?"

I took her in my arms. "I'm O.K.," I said, "and you certainly saved my life." I hugged her tight and glanced past her. "Look!" I exclaimed. "The painting—he left it here—he must have thought it was in the portfolio!"

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "I don't understand."

I explained as well as I could. "Maybe I shouldn't have mentioned the police," I finished. "That would mean disgrace to the whole family, which is unthinkable. I couldn't actually do that, but I thought the threat would bring Takahito to his senses."

"That's why he tried to kill you."

I nodded. "Yes. Because, compared to betraying his father and stealing from him, murder is almost a minor, negligible crime."

"And what about the painting?" Janet said, pointing to it.

"I'll take it back to Yazawa, with the least possible fuss. I'm due to go to Japan next month, so maybe I'll make it a little earlier."

"You'll go as soon as you can," she said. "Richard, I'm scared. We'll move to a hotel and stay there until you leave, because Takahito is bound to come back here. He'll feel he has to kill you now." I agreed, and she knelt down and examined the painting. "It's beautiful," she said softly. "So beautiful."

I left three days later. I thought I saw Takahito at the airport, but I wasn't sure. Naturally I was nervous.

I had no trouble with the Customs or the immigration officials. I took the airport limousine to the hotel where I always stayed. The route was straight down a long avenue flanked by ugly little houses, but to me at least the signs with their lovely Japanese characters gave the street a picturesqueness and graciousness that was far from ugly.

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I kept glancing behind to see if we were followed. I saw only taxis and bicycles and trucks, many of which were the small, three-wheeled variety. Shopkeepers were wetting down the streets. When we stopped for a traffic light, I heard the familiar sound of wooden clogs slapping on the pavement. A fair proportion of women still wore kimonos, but the majority were in western clothes. Japan in transition, I thought, and taking it hard. Takahito's problem of adjustment was no exception.

My hotel was a new modern building, and I walked into a broad cool lobby that buzzed with activity. I headed for the desk, where the clerk remembered me and greeted me with the warm courtesy that comes so naturally to the Japanese.

I put down my bag with the precious painting. I straddled it, glanced at the people nearest me. A man with a moustache changing money, a woman arranging a trip to Hakone. He looked English, she was plainly American. I had nothing to worry about. Nevertheless I pressed my ankles tightly against the bag while I unclipped my pen and filled out the registration card. Name, address, date of arrival, passport number. I reached into my pocket for my passport. It wasn't there.

I put the pen down and searched my side pockets. Nothing, I emptied my inside pocket, pulled out papers, letters, my address book. Still no passport.

The clerk smiled. "You find it later," he said, to reassure me. "There is no need now."

"I had it an hour ago," I said anxiously. "I had it when I went through Immigration. I couldn't have lost it. Impossible."

"I will make search," the clerk said, as if he located lost passports every day, knew exactly where to look, never failed.

"I have to find it," I said obstinately. I felt that Takahito was at the bottom of this. Somehow he'd managed to—

Then my eye caught my raincoat lying on top of my big bag at the other end of the lobby. And I remembered. I'd stuck the passport into the pocket of my raincoat.

I laughed in relief. "Over there," I said, and I crossed the lobby. The clerk followed, watched me pick up the coat and shove my hand in a pocket. My fingers touched the all-important passport and I pulled it out. The crisis was over.

"Here it is!" I said happily.

An American tourist, lounging in a chair and obviously bored, asked

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me what had happened. I explained. He started to tell me how he'd once lost a passport. The anecdote was long and pointless. I listened impatiently and cut him off as quickly as I could. Then I returned to the desk, completed the registration form, and bent down to get my flight bag. It was gone.

"Who?" I exclaimed, and I stopped. First I misplaced my passport, now my bag. I felt like an idiot.

"Something is wrong?" the clerk said.

"My bag—I left it here, I had it next to my feet."

The clerk nodded. "You did not carry it across the lobby."

I whirled, saw the Englishman who'd been changing the money, and walked over to him. "My bag," I said. "Did you notice it? Who took it? Did you—"

"Beg pardon?" he said coldly and gave me a blank look.

I wanted to yell out, to tell the fool clerk that a valuable painting had been stolen under his nose while he'd watched me get my raincoat. His job was at the desk, he shouldn't ever have left it.

But I couldn't make a fuss. I had no right to have the painting in my possession. It belonged in Yazawa's collection, he kept it in his stone earthquake-proof vault, and I could be arrested for having it. It was a national treasure, registered with the government, held by Yazawa in sacred trust for the people of Japan. I was helpless.

"It contained something of value?" the clerk asked.

"No," I said quickly. "Nothing much. My overnight things. Somebody must have taken it by mistake. Let me know when it's turned in."

The clerk, cleared of responsibility, smiled gratefully. He handed a key to the boy, who took my big bag and brought it to my room.

I sat there for a while, thinking. If Takahito had the painting, he'd take it back to America as soon as he could. And I had to stop him.

I went out at once, took a taxi to the office of Japan Airlines, and requested space on the first available flight to the States. There was nothing for a full week. I asked them to check with other carriers, and they phoned. Absolutely impossible, they reported. Nothing for at least two days.

Good, I thought. If I can't leave today, neither can Takahito.

I returned to my hotel, called Yazawa, and made an appointment for the morning. I said nothing about Takahito, nor did he.

The ringing of my phone startled me and I picked it up.

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"Hello?" I said.

"Mr. Corwin?" The voice, speaking with a Japanese accent, was unfamiliar to me. "You lose something important?"

"Where is it?" I asked excitedly. "Who are you and—"

The phone went dead, and I put the receiver down slowly. Takahito, and no one else, knew about the picture. The voice had not been Takahito's, nor would he need to ask whether I'd lost anything.

Who, then? And why the strange question?

I sat in my room and tried to figure things out. If Takahito had come to Tokyo, his purpose was to get the picture and prevent me from seeing his father. In that case, I knew the danger point—Yazawa's art shop. It was located in the middle of a narrow street, barely wide enough for two small cars to squeeze past each other. It was the bottleneck, and I was certain to go there.

I had, then, no worries until I took that last step, no obstacles until I reached the final one. And there—a hand would grab me, a knife would thrust out, and it would be all over.

And if Takahito was not in Tokyo? Then someone else had stolen the painting and would be caught when he tried to dispose of it. The police would trace it to me, and as a result I'd have to close up my business and look for some other means of livelihood, because the illegal possession of a national treasure would ruin my reputation. I'd be through, and the Yazawa family would suffer a deep disgrace.

At six o'clock my phone rang again.

"Mr. Corwin?" a voice said. It was soft, and the accent was not Japanese. Oriental, I thought, but definitely not Japanese. "Mr. Corwin, I perhaps have something which you lost. I think you desire to have it again."

"What?" I asked. "Where did you find it, and who are you?"

"It is my pleasure to return it, but I think you will wish to offer reward. Please to come to Osacone Restaurant, in Shinbashi section, and bring much money."

"How will I get there?"

"I will be pleased to send taxi, and taxi-man will bring you."

"How much do you want?" I asked.

"It is so very complicated," he purred. "We will talk of that, the two of us. Such a pleasure." And he hung up.

I went downstairs. The hotel was set back from the street, and the driveway and parking area were in front of the entrance. I paced nervously

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up and down, reentered the hotel, stepped outside again, lit a cigarette, took a few puffs, and stamped it out. I was jittery, but at least I didn't have to deal with Takahito.

The sending of a taxi didn't bother me. Very few of the streets in Tokyo have names, so addresses are complicated. The simplest way to find me would be to hire a cab near the restaurant, send the driver to my hotel, and tell him to bring me back to the restaurant.

I watched a couple of taxis pull up to the hotel, discharge their passengers, and drive off. But the third cab was empty and the driver put on his brakes, took a piece of paper from the seat next to him, and examined the writing. I figured this was my man, and I approached him.

"You came for me?" I said. "Mr. Corwin?"

The driver understood no English, but he climbed out and peered at me uncertainly. After a moment, he handed me the slip of paper. The message on it was in Japanese.

I shook my head to indicate that I didn't understand. He motioned towards the lobby of the hotel, and I nodded. The clerk would interpret. When I turned around, Takahito was standing a few feet away.

"You!" I exclaimed and I tensed up, waiting for the attack.

Takahito merely smiled. "I wish to help," he said quietly.

"I don't need your help, or want it," I said stiffly.

Takahito shrugged and spoke to the driver in Japanese. The driver answered him, opened the door of the cab, and got in.

"He say he take you to a Korean gentleman," Takahito said. "What for?"

"None of your business."

"What for?" Takahito asked again. "You lose something?"

I stepped back. "Oh—*you* called this afternoon. Or rather a friend of yours called, and then hung up."

Takahito nodded, admitting that I'd guessed right. "Koreans dangerous, and very tricky," he said. "I accompany you."

"The hell you will!" I said.

"Please—show me paper."

"Get out of my way," I said.

Takahito grabbed and got his fingers on the note. I hit him with my elbow and he bounced sideways, tearing the paper in two. He clawed at the piece I was still holding. In a rage, I gave him a vicious shove that

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sent him reeling back. He fought to keep his balance, couldn't make it, and fell heavily. I jumped into the cab and slammed the door.

"Go!" I yelled. "Fast—quick—get going!"

The cabdriver understood what I meant and started with a jerk that slapped me against the back of the seat. Through the rear window I saw Takahito pick himself up, start to run after the car, and then stop. It swung into the street and picked up speed.

I stared at the bit of paper I still held. It probably told the clerk that the cab was the one I was waiting for. I crumpled the scrap and stuck it in my pocket.

During the drive across Tokyo, I kept my eyes closed. Nobody drives in a straight line or relinquishes the right of way. Other cars are enemies and you fight them in a war of nerves, with the horn one of your chief weapons. Passengers should never look, and I didn't.

I had plenty of other things to worry about, and what scared me most was Takahito's relentless determination. He'd followed me five thousand miles across the Pacific, and he'd been watching me all day. Somehow he'd found out about the loss of the bag with its precious contents and he realized I was his only means of recovering it. Temporarily I was safe from him, but as soon as I had the picture again, he'd return to the business of killing me.

I shuddered.

Eventually the cab turned into a narrow street and halted in front of a small house. It had no sign. The door opened almost at once, and a maid bowed and motioned me inside. I paid the driver and stepped into a vestibule with a damp concrete floor. There was a small bar to the right. In front of me, on the raised wooden platform, were a half dozen pairs of slippers. I took off my shoes and exchanged them for slippers.

The maid bowed again and spoke to me. I had no idea what she was saying, but she gestured to me to go upstairs, and I went. I was in a Japanese-style restaurant, and a good one, where you had to make reservations ahead of time and where you ate in the privacy of an individual room. There would be no chairs and no furniture in it except the low table.

At the head of the stairs I saw a doorway. The paper-and-lattice shoji had been slid back. I kicked off my slippers and stepped inside.

A small chubby man was kneeling in front of the table. On it stood a

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bottle of *sake* and a pair of cups. My flight bag lay on the floor beside him.

He bowed low. "Mr. Corwin," he said.

I nodded curtly and sat down crosslegged on the cushion opposite him. He smiled, indicated the *sake* cups, and lifted the bottle. I held my cup for him to pour. We drank in silence.

"So pleased that you come," he said politely. "I think you have questions to ask me."

"No," I said. "Just give me my bag or else I'll take it. Obviously you picked it up in the hotel lobby while I went over to my other baggage. You think it's valuable and you want a reward." I opened my wallet and took out a ten-thousand-yen note. "Here," I said.

He didn't touch it. "I think you joke," he said.

"Take it or leave it," I said, and started to get up.

He raised his hand. "If police find contents of bag," he said, "then you have great trouble. They ask how you possess so valuable painting. Then the newspaper tell about the dealer and the stolen painting, and the result—most unfortunate."

He was right about that. He had me boxed. "You have a proposition?" I said.

"I am business man," he said, "and my business is to make money. So I spend day finding out about you. It is so peculiar, I think, that you bring registered national treasure *to* Japan, and that you hide it so carefully. The Customs men much interested."

"You stole my bag," I said. "So where do you come off?"

"Please to use polite words," he said solemnly. "I think the bag is lost, so I try to restore to rightful owner, which I now do. But this—" He indicated the note. "This is not adequate thanks."

"What is?"

"Ten thousand dollars," he said.

"You're crazy!" I said angrily. "I don't have that much. And if I did, I wouldn't give it to you." I stood up and my intention to sock him and take my bag must have been pretty clear.

He smiled, and pulled a gun. "I advise not," he said. "You see, I come prepared."

I took his advice. Then, to my surprise, I saw him gasp and lean back. I heard a light footstep behind me and I whirled. Takahito was there,

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moving forward slowly. The knife that he held had an eight-inch blade, of silvery, gleaming steel.

He kept his eyes on the Korean, but he spoke to me. "The taxi-man paper have restaurant map," he said. "I come, and I listen outside."

I backed up. A man with a knife and a man with a gun. When the man with the knife got close enough, the man with the gun would fire.

Apparently Takahito read my thoughts. "Perhaps loaded," he said. "Perhaps not. Soon I find out."

"Is loaded," the Korean said grimly. I backed off another step.

"I see him take bag this morning," Takahito said. "You cross lobby and leave it, and he take. I wish to follow, but he go out back way and I lose him. Then I wonder, does he have painting, or do you have?"

"And your friend called to find out," I added.

"Take bag," Takahito ordered crisply.

The gun shifted to cover me. "Gentlemen," the Korean said. "Everything so easily arranged." His free hand reached out and touched my bill. "Ten thousand yen is ten thousand yen, and each of us happy."

"No," said Takahito. "You try blackmail once, you try again. I do not trust you with honor of my family."

The gun swung back and pointed at Takahito. Takahito blinked and made a sudden lunge. I leapt back and sought the protection of the wall. I heard a grunt, then an agonized, gutteral moan, but there was no shot. I turned and saw the knife buried deep in the Korean's chest. Takahito was kneeling above him.

"Take bag," he said hoarsely, "and go. You never here, never see him, painting never leave the house of my father."

I picked up the bag and left.

In the morning I read the item in the paper concerning the murder of a Korean named Choi Soo. He was known to the police as a petty thief who hung around hotels and preyed on tourists, and he had been stabbed by an unidentified man who had committed suicide after the act. When found, Choi Soo had an imitation gun in his hand. It was believed that the assailant had killed without realizing that the gun was harmless. His motive for suicide was not clear.

I went to see Yazawa around ten o'clock. He was waiting for me in the Japanese-style room behind his office. The flower arrangement in the

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recessed *tokonoma* was a work of art, the painting on the scroll above it was a rare and ancient Buddha.

Yazawa bowed low when I entered and I bowed equally low. He motioned me to the seat of honor, with my back to the *tokonoma*, and I sat down. We spoke quietly, as old friends do, while a servant brought in the tea.

As soon as we were alone I handed him the painting. He glanced at it only long enough to identify it.

"It is a burden," he said. "It is not right for one man to hide a thing of such beauty. I think I give it to a museum."

"That's a good idea," I said. "Takahito—"

He raised his hand to his lips, in token of silence. "My son is dead," he said slowly. "There is no Takahito."

I wondered how I could tell him that before Takahito had died he had returned to the truth and the honor of the old ways. But Takahito had discovered them too late, and the real lesson, combining the best of the new with the best of the old, had escaped him.

I lifted my cup and slowly sipped my tea, but I did not speak. Nor did my friend.

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The Art of Deduction

by Richard Deming

The girl in front of me at the loading gate was a slim, shapely brunette with a deep tan, nice features and a cute little nose that was just beginning to peel from sunburn. While we waited, I made up my mind that I would do my best to get the seat next to her, if I could manage it without being too obvious.

When we boarded the plane I was in luck. All the window seats but one were taken. When she took that, it was quite natural for me to slide in beside her. As no one took the aisle seat, I had her to myself.

I made no attempt at conversation right then, because I am always a little nervous on takeoff and landing, but when we were airborne and the stewardess had finished her little welcome-aboard talk, I turned an expansive smile on the girl.

"Hi, seatmate," I said. "My name is Albert Shelton."

She looked a little startled, but after examining me speculatively for a moment, she seemed to decide I was harmless. "How do you do, Albert? I'm Diane Wharton."

"Shall we get the vital statistics out of the way?" I inquired.

"What do you mean?"

"I always talk to the person next to me on a plane, and from past experience it seems likely that in the course of conversation I will reveal a good deal of data about myself, and in return will learn a good deal about you. It would save considerable time if we disposed of this matter at once, so we could get on to more interesting things. I am twenty-five, unmarried, and two months ago graduated from U.C.L.A. I finished school at such an advanced age because I spent from age eighteen to twenty-one in the army. I am en route to Buffalo to accept a job with the Appleton Detective Agency, which happens to be owned by my uncle. Fred Appleton, of whom you may have heard since you also are from Buffalo, is my mother's older brother."

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She gave me another startled look. "How do you know I'm from Buffalo?"

"Elementary, my dear Wharton. I looked over your shoulder when you handed in your ticket at the gate, and the flight-reservation envelope you took it from showed you had bought a round-trip ticket from Buffalo."

She emitted a tinkling little laugh. "You're funny. You sound just like Sherlock Holmes. But I suppose that's appropriate, since you're going to be a private eye."

"We in the profession prefer the term 'confidential investigator.' "

Her eyes twinkled. "Excuse me. I suppose you took your degree in either criminalistics or police administration."

I shook my head. "I was not, until a week ago, planning a career as a confidential investigator. I majored in philosophy and logic, but in our technological society there doesn't seem to be much demand for specialists in those fields. In a sense, I am accepting my uncle's job offer as a last resort. Yet the prospects interest me intensely, and actually I feel my educational background will be of considerable value. Great criminalists of the past have often depended more on deductive reasoning than on scientific knowledge; men such as the late Raymond Schindler, for example."

"You seem to have some deductive talent," she said. "I was quite impressed by your guess that I am from Buffalo. Can you tell me anything else about myself?"

After studying her judiciously, I said, "Well, for starters, your purpose for being in Southern California was simply vacationing."

"Oh? How did you deduce that?"

"From three factors. First, you wouldn't have bought a round-trip ticket if you were out here looking for work, or had planned to live here for some other reason, then changed your mind. Second, August is a vacation month. Third, your fresh suntan indicates you have recently spent a good deal of time on the beach. I know it's a fresh suntan because you got your nose sunburned acquiring it. You neglected to put suntan oil on your nose, didn't you?"

She regarded me with a mixture of amusement and awe. "You're amazing. Tell me more."

"All right. You were visiting your fiancé out here, and just before you left, you broke your engagement."

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She gave me a suspicious side-glance. "You've been following me, haven't you, private eye? Excuse me; I mean confidential investigator."

"I never saw you until just before we boarded the plane. I know you broke your engagement because the white circle around the ring finger of your left hand is just the size and shape of an engagement ring. Its whiteness indicates you have not been out in the sun since you took it off. Ergo, you gave it back at the very end of your vacation."

She emitted another of her tinkling little laughs.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"It sounds so simple when you explain it. I would be more impressed if you kept the explanations to yourself. Is that it, or is there more?"

"Oh, yes. Your fiancé either has been studying criminalistics and police administration at U.C.L.A., or is teaching one or the other."

She cocked a quizzical eyebrow. "How in the world did you deduce that?"

"Because you asked me if I had taken my degree in either subject. Being from Buffalo, how would you know they are taught at U.C.L.A. unless you had a close relationship with either a student or teacher in that department?"

"Goodness, you're remarkable."

"Quite elementary, really. One last item. You graduated from the University of Buffalo a year ago, probably from the school of nursing."

She cocked an eyebrow at me again. "I suppose the explanation for that deduction is just as simple as the rest," she said teasingly.

"Even more so. I cheated a little this time. I recognized the class ring you're wearing on your right hand because my last year in service I dated an army nurse who had graduated from the University of Buffalo. And the year of graduation is embossed on your ring in large enough figures to be seen quite plainly."

"That doesn't explain your deduction that I am a nurse."

"That was just a wild guess," I admitted. "Sort of a hunch. Because the only girl I ever knew who wore a similar ring was a nurse, I guess I was guilty of a sophism that just happened to be valid."

"Sophism," she said. "I remember that from my one course in philosophy. A specious argument based on a false premise."

"Yes. All R.N.s graduating from the University of Buffalo are entitled to wear school rings. Therefore all girls wearing U. of B. school rings are R.N.s."

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Diane giggled.

"I'll concede it was nothing more than a lucky guess," I said. "But my other deductions were based on sound enough evidence, weren't they?"

"I think you're wonderful," she said with apparent sincerity.

Although by then I was reasonably sure that Diane liked me as much as I was growing to like her, she volunteered very little information about herself other than what I had deduced. For instance, she told me nothing about her ex-fiancé or what had caused their breakup, and naturally I didn't pry. She did tell me that she lived with her parents in a two-family house on Fillmore in Buffalo, however, and when I asked if I might call her sometime, she consented and wrote her phone number on the inside of a matchbook.

We had left Los Angeles at 11:50 a.m. By the time we landed at Detroit at 5:50 p.m., Detroit time, we had become firm friends.

After the passengers who were getting off at Detroit had deplaned, the stewardess signaled for the rope at the loading gate to be removed and passengers began streaming toward the plane.

The plane took off, and as soon as the seat-belt sign was lifted I excused myself to go back to the rest room. In the last seat on the left, I noticed two men handcuffed together. Both men were in their late forties. It was easy enough to tell which man was the cop and which the prisoner. The man nearest the aisle had to be the cop, because his left wrist was cuffed to the other man's right. He was a tall, very pale man somewhat resembling Abraham Lincoln without a beard. The other was also tall, but heavier-set and with a round, fleshy face, deeply tanned.

The stewardess was taking dinner orders, and I heard both men order coffee with their meals. I got back to my seat at the same time the stewardess got that far. Diane and I both ordered Swiss steak. Then I told her about the two men in the back seat.

"What does the prisoner look like?" she asked.

"Quite ordinary. Pushing fifty, I would guess."

We dropped the subject then, because our dinners came.

When dinner period was over and the stewardess had collected everyone's dishes, a buzz of excited conversation behind us caused us both to rise to our feet and peer toward the rear of the plane. The tall, pale police officer was in the act of lifting the limp form of his seatmate out into the aisle to lay him flat on his back. He had unlocked the cuff from his own

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wrist, but the other ring was still clamped about the prisoner's wrist. He knelt next to the unconscious man, feeling his pulse.

The stewardess hurried along the aisle from the front to see what was going on.

Looking up at her, the detective said, "I think he's having a heart attack. His pulse is very slow and weak."

Like us, most of the other passengers toward the rear of the plane had risen to their feet to gaze back that way. A lean, rather distinguished-looking man in his mid-forties, who had been seated all alone across the aisle from us and one seat back, stepped out into the aisle as the stewardess started to kneel next to the prone man and said, "I'm a doctor, Miss."

The stewardess immediately rose and stepped aside so that the doctor could squeeze past her. The detective introduced himself to the doctor as Sergeant Copeland, then got out of the way by reseating himself.

Kneeling next to the unconscious man, the doctor thumbed back an eyelid, peered into the eye, then unbuttoned the man's suit coat, stripped off his necktie and unbuttoned his shirt. Looking up at the stewardess, he said, "My medical bag is beneath my seat. Will you get it, please?"

She brought him the bag, he drew a stethoscope from it and listened to the patient's heartbeat. After a few moments he put the stethoscope away, zipped his bag shut and stood up.

"Coronary thrombosis, probably," he said to the stewardess. "Fortunately you're equipped with oxygen. How long before we land at Buffalo?"

Glancing at her watch, she said, "It's seven, and we're due in at quarter to eight."

"Roughly three-quarters of an hour," the doctor said. "I suggest you have the pilot radio to have an ambulance standing by to take the man to City Hospital. He can tell them no intern need come along with the ambulance, as I am on the City Hospital staff and will ride in with the patient. As a matter of fact, no one but the driver will be necessary, as the sergeant and I can act as litter bearers. As soon as you've delivered the message, bring a blanket to keep the patient warm."

"Yes, sir," the stewardess said, and hurried forward to disappear into the pilot's cabin.

The doctor said to the detective, "Let's get him up on the seat so that we can start giving him oxygen. If you'll retract the armrests between seats, we can lay him on his back." He glanced around and his gaze fell on me. "You look pretty husky, young man. Will you give us a hand?"

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I went back and helped lift the inert form onto the seat. When the patient was on his back across all three seats, the doctor pulled out the seat's oxygen mask and affixed it to the man's face. Then he checked his heart with his stethoscope again.

"No worse, but no better either," he said as he slipped the instrument back into his bag. "He might be more comfortable without that manacle dangling from his wrist, Sergeant."

Sergeant Copeland took a key from his pocket, unlocked the cuff and dropped the handcuffs into his coat pocket.

"Incidentally, my name is Martin Smith," the doctor said, offering the detective his hand.

Shaking it, the sergeant said, "Glad to know you, Dr. Smith. And I'm certainly glad you were aboard."

"My name is Albert Shelton," I offered.

Both of them looked at me. The doctor said politely, "Thank you for your help, Albert."

"You're welcome. Dr. Smith, my seatmate is a registered nurse, if you need her help."

He gave me a surprised look. "Well, thanks, but there is nothing she could do at the moment." Turning to the elderly man who was the sole occupant of the seat directly across the aisle from the patient, he said, "Sir, would you mind moving up to the seat I was occupying, so that I can sit here near the patient, in case he—"

"Not at all," the man said, immediately moving forward.

"Want to sit next to the window, Sergeant?" the doctor asked. "I had better stay on the aisle so that I can keep an eye on him."

"In a minute," the detective said. "I just had a weird thought."

Leaning over the patient, Sergeant Copeland rummaged in the unconscious man's coat pocket and withdrew a small bottle of liquid. He handed it to the doctor. Looking over the doctor's shoulder, I read the label the same time he did. It said: *Sweet-as-Sugar*. Below that, in smaller print, was *Concentrated Sweetener* and *No Cyclamates*.

Looking up, the doctor said, "A common sugar substitute. What about it?"

"At dinner he wanted to put some in his coffee. After examining the bottle, I let him. It just occurred to me there might be something other than artificial sweetener in there. This could have been attempted suicide,

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since he was going back to New York to face twenty more years of hard time."

"Hmm," the doctor said. Unscrewing the cap, he sniffed at the bottle's contents, then recapped it. "I really can't tell, and I'm not about to taste it to find out. We'll take it along to the hospital and have it analyzed."

He dropped the bottle into his pocket, then added, "There are a number of poisons that cause the same symptoms as coronary thrombosis. If it were a suicide attempt, I couldn't possibly guess which one until we can get the contents of this bottle analyzed. But if he's been in custody, where would he have gotten hold of any poison?"

Sergeant Copeland said, "Until recently he hasn't been in custody for weeks. He escaped from Sing Sing six weeks ago, and was arrested on the West Coast only about a week back. He may have decided to carry a suicide potion around just in case he was caught. And he would know what to get. He's been an aide in the prison medical dispensary for the past five years."

"What was he in prison for?" the doctor asked.

"About three dozen bank robberies. Don't you remember Willie the Parrot Doyle?"

After considering, the doctor said, "Vaguely. A number of years back, wasn't it?"

"About a dozen. He's been in stir for ten. He was head of the Doyle Gang, which once consisted of eight or nine gunmen. All but two, aside from Willie himself, are now either in prison or dead. Willie's younger brother Jim and Smooth Eddie Greene, who is a cousin of Willie's, are both at large. As a matter of fact, Greene has never even been arrested, so we don't have mug shots of him. Jim Doyle has a record, though, and I've seen his mugs. Looks like a younger version of Willie."

I had been standing there silent all this time, but now I put in, "How did Doyle get his nickname of Willie the Parrot?"

"He used to talk a lot when pulling bank jobs," the sergeant explained. "Kept up a steady flow of banter with the bank employees and customers as he directed them to lie on the floor on their stomachs, or herded them into vaults. Apologized to the ladies for inconveniencing them, told the ugly ones they were beautiful, cracked a lot of jokes. Just kept up a steady stream of chatter."

"How about Smooth Eddie Greene?" I asked.

"He's called that because he's actually more con man than bank robber.

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He used to case banks by representing himself as an industrialist who was planning to open a branch factory in town. He would ask to see the manager in order to discuss whether the bank would be capable of handling a million-dollar-a-month payroll. Bank managers have been known to explain their alarm systems in detail in order to convince him his company funds would be safe in their banks."

The stewardess came along with a blanket, which she handed to the doctor. She said, "The pilot radioed your message. An ambulance from City Hospital will be there. He told them no attendants other than the driver will be needed."

"Good," Dr. Smith acknowledged.

After tucking the blanket around the patient, he bent to listen to his breathing. When he straightened again, the stewardess asked, "Is he all right?"

"He's far from all right," Dr. Smith told her. "But he's still alive."

The stewardess went away again. The doctor turned to the detective. "Will you be wanting to ride along in the ambulance with us, Sergeant?"

"Naturally."

"In his condition he won't be running off. And there is a prison ward at City Hospital he couldn't escape from even if he fully recovered. But it's up to you."

"Thanks, I'll stick with my prisoner," the detective said in a definite tone.

Dr. Smith shrugged. "If it is a heart attack instead of a poisoning, he probably won't be able to be moved for at least a month. You won't wait around all that time, will you?"

"Oh, no. I'll leave him in the custody of the Buffalo police and come back for him when he's again able to travel. Why are we still standing here in the aisle? Let's sit down."

He slid over against the window in the set across the aisle from the unconscious man. The doctor took the aisle seat, leaving me the only one standing.

"He'll probably be assigned as one of my patients, since I'm taking him in," Dr. Smith said. "If you'll give me your card, I'll keep you abreast of his condition."

The detective took out a wallet, searched through it and said apologetically, "I seem to be out of cards. Do you have a piece of paper?"

Searching his pockets, the doctor came up with his flight-reservation

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envelope and handed it to the detective. Sergeant Copeland laid it on his knee, took out a pen and began to write on it. I turned away and returned to my seat.

Diane whispered to me in an embarrassed voice, "I thought I would die when you volunteered my services. I am *not* a registered nurse."

I gave her a surprised look. "You said you were."

"No, *you* said I was, and I just didn't correct you. I hated to spoil your remarkable record of deductive reasoning."

"Oh," I said, somewhat deflated. After a moment of silence, I said, "Well, he doesn't need your services anyway." Then something suddenly struck me and I sat bolt upright.

"What's the matter?" Diane asked.

"I just watched Sergeant Copeland use a pen," I said in a low voice. "And guess what? He writes left-handed."

She looked at me blankly. "So?"

"So why did he have his left wrist shackled to the prisoner?"

After considering this, she said, "That *is* odd."

Still in a low voice I said, "Actually we have only Sergeant Copeland's word that he is the police officer and the other man is the prisoner."

Diane looked startled. "What are you getting at?"

I said, "The prisoner seems pretty suntanned for a convict who has been cooped up ten years. And the sergeant is remarkably pale. You might almost say he has a prison pallor."

In a slightly unsteady voice Diane said, "The prisoner escaped weeks ago. He could have acquired a tan. And it's not unusual for people who work in New York City to be pale."

"In an outside job like a cop's?"

After a period of silence she said, "If what you're suggesting is right, how did he ever work it?"

I pursed my lips and stared out the window at the clouds below until I had my thoughts organized. Finally I said, "Let's assume both men are left-handed. The real Sergeant Copeland would shackle the prisoner to his right wrist because his gun was strapped to his left side. My guess is that the liquid in that bottle labeled as a sweetener *is* some kind of poison and that Willie somehow managed to slip it into the sergeant's coffee. Willie simply waited until the sergeant was unconscious, then switched wallets with him, removed the man's holster from his belt and put it on his own, then dropped the bottle of poison into the sergeant's pocket.

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He unlocked the cuff from his own wrist, but left the other ring still attached, pulled the man out into the aisle and called the stewardess."

Diane said nothing for some time, merely thinking all of this over. Eventually she said, "Why would he deliberately call the doctor's attention to the poison?" "Because he intends to brazen it out just as though he were Sergeant Copeland. No one in Buffalo knows what the sergeant looks like. When the patient arrives at the hospital and it is discovered he did not suffer a heart attack, but was poisoned, no suspicion will be cast on the so-called sergeant because he has already supplied an explanation. He can arrange for the Buffalo police to watch the prisoner for him until he either recovers or dies, then walk off and be halfway to Australia before anyone discovers the patient is really Sergeant Copeland."

"Unless the patient happens to regain consciousness en route to the hospital. Or even right after they pump him out."

"Yes, there is that possibility," I said thoughtfully. "Our pale friend may be insisting on riding along in the ambulance in order to make sure the patient doesn't regain consciousness. I wonder if we could get ourselves invited to ride in that ambulance too."

"Whatever for?" Diane asked in a startled tone.

"To make sure the so-called Sergeant Copeland doesn't have a chance to shut up the patient permanently."

"Wouldn't it be simpler just to phone the police from the airport, tell them your suspicions and have them meet the ambulance at the hospital?"

"The patient could be dead by then," I pointed out. "I really don't think it will be dangerous to ride along. The man isn't going to do anything to give himself away so long as he believes no one suspects him. And by the looks of the patient, he's not going to wake up en route, if ever. I just think our presence would be likely to deter any lethal designs the fake sergeant has. Are you willing to go along?"

"I suppose," she said reluctantly. "But how on earth will we get aboard the ambulance?"

"Leave that to me," I said with confidence. "They think you're a nurse, remember? And I never told them what I am."

Rising, I went back to the rear. The doctor was again leaning over the unconscious man, listening to his heartbeat with his stethoscope. He put it away and resumed his seat as I approached.

"No change," he said to his pale seatmate.

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Halting, I said, "Doctor, I'm a medical student from U.C.L.A. and my companion is a registered nurse. We would be glad to ride along with you in the ambulance."

The pale man said, "Make it a little crowded, wouldn't it?"

"Not really," the doctor said. "No one but the driver will be with the ambulance. There will be plenty of room."

I don't think the so-called Sergeant Copeland liked the idea, but he couldn't very well overrule the doctor. He gave a resigned shrug.

The ambulance was waiting when we landed at Buffalo Airport. Over the intercom the stewardess asked all passengers to keep their seats until the patient could be unloaded. Someone brought a litter, and Dr. Smith, the pale pseudosergeant and I lifted the unconscious man onto it. I volunteered to take one end of the litter, the pale man whom I was convinced was Willie the Parrot Doyle took the other, the doctor went ahead and Diane trailed behind us.

A couple of uniformed airport police were standing beside the ambulance. The ambulance driver was sitting in the cab with his back to us, and didn't even bother to get out. The rear door was already open. We loaded the litter, then the pale man introduced himself to the airport cops as Sergeant Copeland of the NYPD, introduced Dr. Smith and explained the situation. When the airport cops asked who Diane and I were, the doctor explained that we were his assistants and would be riding with him in the ambulance also.

One of the cops said, "Then I guess you've got a full house. One of us was going to offer to ride in with you."

"It won't be necessary," Dr. Smith assured him.

We all climbed in, and the doctor pulled the door closed behind us. We all sat on an empty litter next to the patient's, facing him, the pale man nearest the driver, then me, then Diane, and with Dr. Smith nearest the back door.

There was a partition between the cab and the rear of the ambulance, so that conversation could be carried on with the driver. Dr. Smith said, "All right, driver, we're all in."

The ambulance moved on, its red light blinking and its siren beginning to whine. Shortly after we pulled through the airport gate the siren cut off, though, and the reflection of the flashing red light suddenly stopped appearing alongside the road.

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Diane said sharply, "Why are you turning north, driver?"

The driver made no answer. From the corners of my eyes I was conscious that Dr. Smith was unzipping his medical bag. My attention was primarily fixed on the pale man next to me, however, alert for any false move he might make.

He made one. He was staring past me at the doctor when suddenly his right hand disappeared beneath his coat, then reappeared gripping a snub-nosed .38 Detective Special.

My reaction was a hangover from hand-to-hand combat training in the army. My left hand snaked out to clamp around the cylinder, preventing the gun from firing because the cylinder could not rotate. The edge of my right palm sliced down on the man's wrist. He emitted a yowl of pain and the gun came away in my hand.

"Thanks," the doctor said sardonically. "I think he was beating me to the draw."

I turned to look at him, and my jaw dropped. He as covering all of us with a .45 automatic he had taken from his bag. I gazed from it to the snub-nosed revolver I was uselessly gripping by the cylinder with my left hand. Then I looked back at the doctor.

"I don't understand," I said.

Sergeant Copeland was flexing his right fingers and rubbing his wrist. "I do," he growled. "I just tumbled when he started to pull that cannon from his medical bag. Dr. Smith is really Smooth Eddie Greene, and this fake heart attack was rigged as an escape plan."

"Right," the patient said, sitting up and removing the gun from my grip. "It was *sparteine sulphate* in that bottle, Sergeant. It has the temporary effect on the heart of making it beat slower, causing a slow, weak pulse. Probably wouldn't fool a doctor, but it makes a convincing enough heart attack to fool a layman." He looked at the fake doctor. "Why the devil did you bring along these two kids?"

"I thought some cops might be waiting to ride along, and there were. With them in tow, I had the excuse that there was no more room in the ambulance."

Sergeant Copeland said to me, "Do you mind explaining why you disarmed me, young man?"

I said sheepishly, "I thought you were Willie the Parrot and had switched places with the real sergeant. I'm sorry."

"What gave you that hare-brained idea?" he asked curiously.

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"Well, I saw you write left-handed, and you had been cuffed to the prisoner by your left wrist. Also you are so much paler than Willie. I thought it might be prison pallor."

"I'm ambidextrous and I shoot with my right hand," he informed me. "My pale complexion is because I'm on the homicide night trick."

"Oh," I said in a subdued voice.

Willie the Parrot said to the driver, "All okay back here, Jim. Have any trouble?"

"No," the driver said. "The siren told me when the ambulance was getting close. I pulled out of the side-road and blocked the way with the panel truck just before he got there. When he stopped, I stuck a gun in his face. He's tied up in the back of that hot panel truck. We should be switched to the sedan and be a couple of hundred miles into Canada before anybody finds him on that side-road."

"Your kid brother Jim?" Sergeant Copeland asked Willie, jerking his head toward the driver.

"Uh-huh. We Doyles stick together."

"What are your plans for us, Willie?"

"Well now, Sergeant, what would you do in our position?"

I felt a chill crawl along my spine. I gave Diane an apologetic look. She smiled back at me bravely, but her eyes were brimming with tears.

Willie the Parrot glanced at Smooth Eddie, saw his gun was effectively covering us, and dropped the revolver into his coat pocket. The fake doctor's automatic rested on his knee, aimed past Diane in the general direction of me and the detective.

Diane made a sniffling noise. In a woeful voice she asked Smooth Eddie Green, "May I get my handkerchief from my purse, please?"

"Sure, go ahead," he said generously.

Unsnapping her purse, she dipped her hand into it and brought out a snub-nosed revolver similar to Sergeant Copeland's. It was cocked and aimed at Smooth Eddie's head before he could even start to react. He froze.

In a flat, matter-of-fact voice too low to be heard by the driver, she said, "If you reach for your gun, Willie, I will have to put a bullet through Eddie's head, then shoot you. Eddie, set the safety, then very carefully hand your gun to me."

Eddie did as directed, very carefully. Diane relayed his automatic to Sergeant Copeland, leaned over to lift the revolver from Willie the

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Parrot's pocket and handed that to him also. The sergeant placed his own gun against the back of the driver's head. "Pull over, Jim," he ordered. "Then pass your gun back, butt first."

Jim did as directed.

Neither Sergeant Copeland nor I made any attempt to solve the mystery of how Diane happened to be carrying a gun until all three bank robbers were thoroughly under control. The sergeant cuffed Willie the Parrot's hands behind him, tied Smooth Eddie's behind him with his necktie, and used Willie's necktie on Jim, because the younger brother wasn't wearing any. When they were all loaded into the back of the ambulance and we three were standing behind it, the detective finally looked at Diane.

"I didn't know nurses carried guns, Miss Wharton," he said. "Particularly on planes, where it happens to be a federal offense."

"I'm not a nurse," she said. "I'm a policewoman. And, as you know, the airlines encourage police officers to carry their guns on flights as an added precaution against hijackers."

"A policewoman?" I said. "You're a cop?"

"Yes," she said in an oddly defensive tone. "Do you mind?"

"I think it's wonderful," I said. "It's always an advantage for a confidential investigator to have a friend on the force, and I can't think of a nicer friend to have."

"You may not feel that way when you learn what I did to you," she said ruefully.

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you later. We'd better get our prisoners down to police headquarters now."

"Yeah," Sergeant Copeland said. "This is all very interesting, but let's get moving. Can you drive this thing, Shelton?"

"Of course," I said.

"Then take the wheel and I'll ride guard in back. You can sit up front with him, if you want, Miss Wharton."

She took the offer. We rode in silence for some minutes before I finally said, "What was it you did to me?"

She didn't answer immediately, and when she did her tone was both apologetic and slightly apprehensive. "You're going to be mad at me. I put you on a little about your deductive talent."

"Oh? How?"

"I didn't exactly lie, but I gave you the impression that some of your

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deductions were correct by not saying anything, when actually they weren't."

"I see. Which ones?"

"Well, I wasn't vacationing in L.A. I was taking a summer course in criminalistics at U.C.L.A. I did spend some weekends at the beach, which is how I got my tan, but I got my nose sunburned playing tennis. Incidentally, I attended Fredonia State, not the University of Buffalo."

I looked sidewise in surprise. "Then why are you wearing a U. of B. ring, if I may inquire?"

"It isn't mine," she said, taking it off to show me the string wound around its underside to make it fit because it was too large for her. "Around here, girls wear boys' class rings on their engagement fingers as a symbol of going steady."

"It isn't on your engagement finger."

"No," she said, replacing it on her right hand. "But it was when I left for the West Coast. He doesn't yet know I'm not still wearing it there."

"Oh, so your fiancé wasn't in Los Angeles after all. You broke the engagement by long distance."

"Not an engagement," she corrected. "Just going steady. I had been considering ending it all summer. It started going sour even before I left for summer school, and a couple of weeks ago I decided to break it off as soon as I got back home. But I hadn't run into anyone else there who interested me, so there wasn't much point in removing the ring."

"Then why did you?" I asked.

"I saw you admiring me when we were standing in line at the loading gate. I rather suspected you would like to sit beside me, and I thought seeing the ring might discourage you so I switched it to my right hand while we were waiting in line."

Her revelation that she had been laughing at me on the plane all the time I was posturing as a deductive genius hadn't made me angry at her, as she had expected, but it had considerably deflated my ego. Her statement that some of my deductions had been incorrect was more than kind. Actually, the only thing I had gotten right was that she was from Buffalo.

Now my ego suddenly inflated again, though, with her confession that she had been as instantly attracted to me as I was to her, and her contrition at having put me on sounded sincere enough to merit forgiveness.

Perhaps I was a total flop at the art of deduction, but it looked as though I might have a promising future in the art of seduction.

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Living All Alone

by John Lutz

Miss Simms looked at the house and considered the possibilities. It was a small frame house in a very scenic country setting, in a flat green clearing almost surrounded by tall sycamores. Behind the house was a small, peaceful-looking pond, still and green.

"I'll take it," Miss Simms said with decision.

"All right," Mr. Blacker, the surprised owner, said. "The, uh, price—"

"The price is fair," Miss Simms said in her clear high voice.

"I don't advise it," her Uncle Dan said. "Why, a woman like you, all alone way out here. Ain't another neighbor in sight."

Mr. Blacker looked at Uncle Dan with faintly disguised irritation. "Will be though," he said. "Mile or so down the road some contractor's puttin' in five houses."

Miss Simms stood calmly as Uncle Dan turned to look at her, his grey mustache seeming to droop more than usual. "A mile away he said, Marybelle. Now why do you want to live alone anyway, much less as alone as this? You can stay with Grace an' me, an' you know it."

"I know, Uncle Dan, but this is a beautiful house. I lived with Mother for so long, took care of her for over fifteen years, and now I think I'd like to try living alone."

Mr. Blacker's blue eyes squinted in his seamed face as he watched Miss Simms. Though he wanted to sell the house he had to agree with her uncle. She was, he judged, in her mid-forties, a spinster who would still be attractive to many men. The formless print dress did little to hide her still rounded and firm figure, and her greying blonde hair still caught the sunlight as it hung below her shoulders.

Uncle Dan sighed surrender. "I hope you know what you're doin', Marybelle. You've led somethin' of a protected life and I don't think you realize the dangers to a woman like you who lives alone in an isolated spot."

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Miss Simms smiled a slight smile. "A woman like me?"

"Yes," Uncle Dan said, embarrassed by her direct questioning stare. "I mean to say, you're still an attractive woman, an' the wrong kinds of men are liable to get ideas."

"For the last fifteen years, Uncle Dan, I've been able to take care of both Mother and myself. I think taking care of just myself should be easier than the task I've completed."

Uncle Dan hooked his sausagelike thumbs into his belt. "Well, I'll help you all I can, Marybelle, with buyin' the place an' movin' in an' all."

Miss Simms' delicate face broke into a grateful smile. "I know, and I thank you, Uncle Dan."

"Come on an' follow me to my place in your pickup," Mr. Blacker said. "We'll sign the papers an' get things in order. We'll have to go into town to the title company tomorrow too."

As they walked away from the picture-book frame house with the steep roof, Miss Simms could tell what Mr. Blacker was thinking. He was surprised and glad to find someone who'd actually pay cash for his house without having to arrange for a loan, and like most of the men she knew he was wondering why a woman like herself hadn't married by her age despite an invalid mother.

Uncle Dan wondered about that too, Miss Simms could tell. As far as he knew there had never been any men in her personal life, not even a casual beau. Well, let him wonder, she thought, glancing away from her uncle's thick red neck and behind her at her new home. Let them all wonder.

When the transaction was completed Uncle Dan came out and helped her direct the movers. It was pleasant for a change to be able to afford almost everything she needed. Her mother's insurance money had enabled her to buy this home and, if managed properly, should provide for her for life. So there was no longer money to worry about, and of course there was no longer Mother.

Mr. Blacker was at the house, too, the day Miss Simms moved in. He walked about in the yard with her after the movers had left, puffing on a long foul-smelling cigar and explaining to her just where the boundaries of her property were, showing her the old unused barn concealed by the trees beyond the house. As he talked, Miss Simms was deciding where to plant her garden.

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The first night in the new house was quiet, quiet in a lonely way. Mother had never made noise, crippled as she was, but at least she'd been—well, she'd been *there*. Now when the wind moaned about the house or the floor creaked, only Miss Simms heard.

She told herself it would have been twice as lonely if she'd stayed in the big old house in town, and she made herself ignore the creaks and the wind and the loneliness; but it was a long time before she slept, curled up in the center of the wide double bed.

Miss Simms had always been an immaculate housekeeper and now, with her own home and her home only, she took even more pride in her housework. Everything was scrubbed or painted to gleaming cleanliness; every picture, every lampshade, every throw rug was as straight as if it had been aligned with a ruler.

For the outside of the small frame house she hired professional painters. The color she chose was white, a marshmallow, cloudlike white that seemed to shine with a brightness of its own against the backdrop of green hills and far blue skies. It was the picturesque white of souvenir postcards; pure white.

There was a handyman whom Mr. Blacker sent around now and then to repair little things he'd agreed to fix. His name was Carl Orton. He was a big man with filthy hands who drank too much, sometimes even on the job, but he was a capable worker, with all his faults. Sometimes when he was supposed to show up, the day would pass and Miss Simms would find out he'd disappeared again, driven away in his old truck to wherever he went, St. Louis, maybe, to get drunk and stay drunk for long spells. Then, sometimes weeks later, he'd come back and act as if it all hadn't happened.

Carl Orton continued to come around and offer Miss Simms his help even after he'd finished all the jobs Mr. Blacker had given him, and he'd even gone so far as to fix the porch steps for her and not charge her. Miss Simms didn't like that. It made her feel—indebted to him.

Once when Carl Orton had come to fix something he'd brought another man with him, a younger, long-nosed man named Floyd, who did more staring at Miss Simms than work. Miss Simms sat on the porch and watched them as they sweated and toiled to put in more gravel on her long driveway. From the shade of the porch she would watch Floyd plunge his shovel roughly into the pile of gravel and glance at her with one dark eye from behind his extended shoulder.

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Quite a few men from the nearby towns—nearby meaning sometimes over twenty miles away—somehow found excuses to come to knock on Miss Simms' door, offering to work or selling something. She would talk to them coolly but politely and let them know just what the result of any improper advances would be. She talked to most of the men on the shaded front porch, explaining that it was warmer in the house, though if they listened hard they could hear the soft hum of the air-conditioner from around the back of the house. All that hot spring none of them ever got past the front porch to enter Miss Simms' immaculate white frame house.

One day Sheriff Brogan came to call on her. He was a very fat man who perspired a lot beneath his grey uniform and he wore high-topped heavy boots, the thick soles of which were usually caked with mud. Miss Simms was cordial to him and served him lemonade on the front porch.

"I wondered if you'd been havin' any problems up here," Sheriff Brogan said as he sat ponderously in a small webbed lawn chair and sipped his lemonade.

"Problems, Sheriff?"

"I mean, livin' alone an' all."

"I assure you, Sheriff, I'm quite capable. And there's always help to hire for any heavy work."

"Yes, ma'am, but that's not exactly the kind of trouble I meant. You know, an attractive woman like yourself, livin' all alone, can give some of the wrong kinds of men some pretty dangerous ideas. I just wondered if you'd been—well, threatened or anything."

"Threatened with what?" Miss Simms watched the sheriff's broad face redden slightly as he nervously reached down and adjusted his heavy belt and holster so he could sit more comfortably.

"What I mean is," he said, "over the past month or so, much as I get around, I heard a few things mentioned in the taverns an' such. Nothin' uncomplimentary or insultin', understand, but it's just that it seems pretty well known by a lot of the rougher element that you're livin' up here all alone. I think maybe you oughta be kinda careful with the men that do come up here and do odd jobs for you an' such."

"Oh, you needn't worry about me, Sheriff. I never even let them into the house. Usually I just pay them for their labor right here on the porch."

"Yes, ma'am."

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"But if it will make you feel any better, Sheriff, I'll be sure to let you know if anything—suspicious happens."

"I think that'd be a good idea, Miss Simms. That way maybe we could stop trouble before it starts."

"More lemonade, Sheriff?" Miss Simms smiled her very fetching smile at him.

"Another glass would taste good, ma'am, hot as it is out here."

Sheriff Brogan drank two more glasses of lemonade, and as they sat and talked Miss Simms discovered he was quite gossipy. Though he told her some very shocking things, before her he was always careful to keep his language gentlemanly and polite.

When the sheriff did leave, Miss Simms stood and watched him strut pompously in his ridiculously heavy boots toward his car. She wondered if Uncle Dan had sent him around to look after her.

Miss Simms went inside then, into the ordered coolness of the house, and began her daily ritual of straightening and cleaning.

Sometime later, Carl Orton was out in back cutting down some tall weeds Miss Simms had hired him to clear. Since the day was getting extremely hot she felt it would be an act of kindness to invite him onto the porch for cold lemonade. As he sat in the webbed lawn chair, she knew he'd much rather have another kind of drink, but Miss Simms wasn't about to offer him any of that. He did seem grateful for the lemonade, drinking it so quickly and sloppily that some of it dribbled down his chin onto his bare chest. Miss Simms ignored this breach of manners and offered to refill his glass.

"Sure is a nice place you got here," Carl Orton said. Miss Simms could see he felt awkward in her presence.

"I do my best to keep it that way, Mr. Orton." She raised her glass to her lips and took a tiny sip. "You're doing a very good job on the weeds."

"Thanks, Miss Simms. Hot day for it, I can tell you. An' those weeds are thick as fur."

"It's amazing how they grow and grow," Miss Simms observed. "Soon they blot out and kill the good grass and flowers."

"That's what they do, all right."

Miss Simms crossed her long legs and twirled the ice in her glass with her little finger.

"I ain't tryin' to be nosy or disrespectful," Carl Orton said, "but livin'

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all alone up here, don't you ever get lonely? There's plenty of good places you could live in Bradley or Union or Bakerston."

Miss Simms stopped stirring her lemonade and looked at Carl Orton. She understood his question perfectly. "I like it where I am, thank you," she said.

"Yes'm."

She stood, looking down at him, and stretched languidly against the sun. "I'm going inside for a nap, Mr. Orton. If it's all right with you, I'll pay you for cutting the weeds now."

"Fine with me, Miss Simms."

When she'd given Mr. Orton his money, Miss Simms went inside and locked all the doors carefully. Then she went upstairs and watched him for a while as he stood in the waist-high weeds near the lake and swung the heavy scythe, stopping now and then to wipe his brow with a large red handkerchief and glance up at the back of the house. Miss Simms lay down and thumbed idly through a dress catalog for a while before dozing off.

At about ten that night, when she was cleaning the kitchen for the final time that day, she heard the uneven rising rumble of the truck engine. She turned off the kitchen light and went upstairs.

From her bedroom window Miss Simms saw the twin lights veer slowly off of the long gravel drive into a grove of trees not far from the house. Even before the truck stopped the headlights faded, and outside there was only darkness.

Miss Simms stood at the window, her breath dragging in her throat. She felt a tightness spread all through her body. She knew by the sound of the motor that it was Carl Orton out there in the darkness. Probably he was drunk, still drinking. She knew he drank Mellow Springs bourbon; she'd seen the empty bottles one day on the floor of his battered pickup truck.

Well, let the fool sit out there, she thought, switching on the light.

Without pulling the bedroom window shade, Miss Simms casually got completely undressed for bed. After removing her clothes, she didn't put on her nightgown for a while before turning out the light.

Lying there alone in the big bed, she heard the noise outside, a faint noise, a scraping kind of shuffle. It was a wonder she heard it at all, the

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way the crickets were raising such a racket. It seemed like the crickets were actually screaming that night.

Had Carl Orton got tired of sitting there, drinking and watching the square window that was like an eye in the pure white wall of the house?

It was then that Miss Simms remembered she hadn't locked the front door before coming up to bed. For a moment she lay there, her senses straining, then she got quickly out of bed and went noiselessly down the stairs to the hall closet where the deer rifle Uncle Dan had given her for protection was leaning.

Five minutes later the front door of the white frame house opened slowly. At first there was only faint moonlight, then Carl Orton's dark shape was there, and a little unsteadily he leaned forward and walked into the house.

A light came on.

Orton straightened and gasped. Miss Simms was there, as he had seen her through her bedroom window, only she was aiming a rifle at him.

Between them there was a silence, and even the mindless screaming of the crickets seemed to hush.

The crack of the rifle sounded loud in the house and rolled for miles over the hills, but far out in the country nobody paid particular attention to a solitary, distant gunshot.

The next day Miss Simms scrubbed the hall thoroughly and then drove Mr. Orton's battered truck into the old barn beyond the house. Then she drove to a nursery near Bradley where she bought a fair-size plum tree and had it loaded into the back of her station wagon.

She wielded the shovel in the cool of the morning, beating the heat of the rising sun, and by noon the plum tree stood in a circle of crumbled earth near the edge of her property, away from the house, and Carl Orton lay below its grasping roots.

Of course no one inquired about Carl Orton, and when they would think to inquire it certainly wouldn't be here, at Miss Simms' house. Undoubtedly when he'd paid his nighttime visit he had done so secretly.

Nothing had really changed inside the immaculate white frame house; nothing had changed at all.

By midsummer there were five plum trees in a perfect line near the edge of Miss Simms' property. Though still small, they all seemed to be thriving in the rich dark soil.

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Everything was fine, as it had always been, until Mr. Blacker came to talk to her.

He had sold her the house, which he'd built long ago for his sister, and he still lived down the highway near Union, and since he was up that way he'd decided that he'd be the one to let Miss Simms know.

"That contractor's started work on his houses down the road a piece," he said, removing the cigar from his dark crinkled face.

"I'm glad to hear," Miss Simms answered. She thought about offering him some lemonade.

Mr. Blacker stood with one leg propped up on the second porch step, and he peered up at her with his clear blue eyes. "I'm afraid you're gonna hafta transplant them plum trees," he said.

Miss Simms felt her heart stir to frenzy, then controlled it. "Why would I have to do that?"

"'Cause of the contractor. He asked me to come tell you about it."

"About what?" Miss Simms dug her nails into her palms."

"Tomorrow mornin' the electric company's gonna lay the underground wiring for them homes, so I thought I oughta tell you about the easement."

"Easement?" Miss Simms had no idea what an easement was.

"Yes, ma'am. Electric company's got the right to lay their wire or whatever in a five-foot strip along the edge of your property."

"But it's mine! I bought it, it's my property!"

"Oh, you own it, all right. It's just that the electric company's got them particular rights. Won't make much difference anyways after the grass grows back. If you'd like I can try to get a man up here today to move them plum trees wherever else you want 'em. Late in the summer, but they might live."

"But I want them *there!*"

Mr. Blacker shrugged. "Talk to the electric company. Probably it'd interfere with their wirin' if you put 'em back there after they was done diggin'."

Miss Simms didn't answer him, only stood and stared at the neat row of plum trees.

"Anyways," Mr. Blacker said, "if'n you want, I'll see if I can get somebody to transplant 'em."

"No," Miss Simms said. "Thank you, no, Mr. Blacker."

"Well, least you know about it," Mr. Blacker said, taking his foot down

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from the porch step and moving back. "Evenin', Miss Simms," he said as he walked toward his car.

Evening! It *was* evening, and he'd said the electric-company work crew would be there in the morning!

Miss Simms went into the house and walked heavily into the kitchen. The iron rooster clock on the wall above the stove read ten minutes after six. She sat for a while at the kitchen table, sipping a glass of ice water, and trying to gather her wits. Then she rose and went upstairs to change into her old pair of slacks and a faded blouse, her work clothes.

The electric-company crew found her at nine the next morning. Each plum tree had been dug up and was lying on its side next to a hole in the earth. Miss Simms was sitting crosslegged before the row of holes, staring vacantly, holding the shovel gently across her lap. At first the work crew thought she'd been taken sick and tried to help her, and then one of them happened to look into one of the holes by the plum trees. On the other side of the yard one other hole had been dug, but that one was empty.

Miss Simms didn't seem particularly upset, except that they couldn't get her to talk. The men took her into the house and called the sheriff, then they all sat quietly and waited.

Miss Simms heard the patrol car brake to a stop on the gravel drive, and she heard the slam of the door. After a little while she heard Sheriff Brogan's loud footsteps on the wooden porch, and he came right into the house, walked right in without knocking. There was a great deal of mud on his heavy boots and on his hands and he tromped right over the immaculately polished tile of the entry hall, one hand brushing the white wall and leaving a long dark smudge. Miss Simms could have cried when she saw that.

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Doctor's Dilemma

by Harold Q. Masur

As soon as we reached the courthouse corridor Papa's face convulsed like a baby's in torment. "I'm dying," he moaned. "I'm bleeding to death."

"You're fine, Papa," I said. "You'll outlive us all."

"Ten grand." A sob caught in his throat. "I posted bail for that lunatic client on your say-so, Counselor. 'Don't worry,' you told me. 'There's no risk.' So where is he? Why didn't he show up in court?"

Papa was Nick Papadopolous, bald, swarthy, barrel-shaped, with capillaries tracing a ruby pattern across his ample nose. "You're a bail bondsman," I said. "There are risks in every business. You win some, you lose some."

It wrung a groan of anguish from his throat. "You have to find him, Counselor. You owe it to me. I trusted you. You heard what the judge said. Have him in court by ten o'clock tomorrow morning or forfeit bail. If he took off, so help me, Jordan, I'll finish you with every bondsman in town. You'll never be able to raise another nickel."

"He'll be here, Papa. I'll have him in court tomorrow morning if I have to carry him. Jaffee isn't a bail jumper. He has too much at stake."

I believed it. Would a trained physician, a hospital intern, risk his career and his future by jumping bail and holing up somewhere because he's charged with felonious assault? Not likely. Dr. Allan Jaffee, a splendid physical specimen, young, handsome, studious, ambitious, seemed to have everything—except will power. He was an obsessive gambler; poker, craps, roulette, sporting events, anything. He had already run through a sizeable inheritance and now, with no liquid assets, he was in the hole to his bookie for four thousand dollars. So he stalled. So the bookie had dispatched some muscle to pressure the doctor, which turned out to be a mistake. Young Jaffee, a former collegiate welterweight champ, had inflicted upon the collector a bent nose, the need for extensive dental work, and various multiple abrasions, contusions, and traumas.

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Because it was a noisy affair, someone had called the law. The cops shipped the collector off in an ambulance and promptly processed Jaffee into the slammer.

At the preliminary hearing, despite my plea of self-defense, the judge agreed with the Assistant D.A. that high bail was appropriate under the circumstances. He sternly labeled the fists of a trained boxer as dangerous weapons, and set the trial date.

So at 10:00 this morning, the clerk had bawled: "The People of the State of New York versus Allan Jaffee." The judge was on the bench, the jury was in the box, the prosecutor was ready, defense counsel was ready, everybody on tap—except the defendant. He hadn't shown.

"Your Honor," I said "the accused is a medical doctor training at Manhattan General. It is possible that he was detained by an emergency. So it seems we have a problem—"

"No, Counselor. *We* have no problem. *You* have a problem. And you have twenty minutes to solve it." He called a recess.

So I had sprinted out of the courtroom, down the corridor to a booth, and got on the horn to the hospital, but they had no knowledge of Jaffee's whereabouts. I tried his apartment. The line was busy. Apparently he hadn't even left yet.

When the twenty minutes were gone, I approached the bench and said to the glaring judge, "If it please Your Honor, I would beg the Court's indulgence for—"

He cut me off. "The Court's indulgence is exhausted, Mr. Jordan. This is intolerable, a blatant disregard of the State's time and money. A warrant will be issued forthwith for immediate execution by the marshal. If the accused has left the jurisdiction of this Court, bail will be forfeit. Your deadline is tomorrow morning, sir. Ten o'clock." He rapped his gavel and called the next case.

Papa's agitation was understandable. With a worldwide liquidity crisis, ten grand was important money. I disengaged his fingers from my sleeve and went back to the telephone. Still a busy signal. I tried twice more—no change. So I said the hell with it and went out and flagged a cab and rode up to East Seventy-ninth Street.

Jaffee lived on the second floor of an aging brownstone. He didn't answer the bell. The door was open and I walked into utter chaos. The place had been ransacked and pillaged. I headed for the bedroom, expecting the worst.

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He was on the floor, propped up against the bed. This time he had been hopelessly overmatched. Somebody, more likely several somebodies, had worked him over good. His face was hamburger. He tried to talk, but it was an incoherent guttural croak. The doctor needed a doctor, but soon.

I looked for the telephone and saw the handset hanging off the hook, which explained the busy signal. I hung up, jiggled, finally got a dial tone, and put a call through to Manhattan General. I told them that one of their interns had been injured, that he was in critical condition, and I gave them his name and address, adding, "This is an emergency. Better step on it if you don't want to lose him."

I turned back and found him out cold, unconscious—probably a blessing.

When the ambulance arrived, I was allowed to ride along, and sat beside the driver while first-aid was being administered in the back. We careened through traffic with the siren wailing, running a few signals and frightening a lot of pedestrians.

"Who clobbered him?" the driver asked.

"I don't know. I found him like that."

"You a friend of Doc Jaffee's?"

"I'm his lawyer."

"Hey, now! He was supposed to be in court this morning, wasn't he?"

"You know about that?"

"Sure. He was on ambulance duty this week and he told me about it. Said he owed a bundle to his bookie but couldn't raise a dime. Said he banged up a guy who came to collect, strictly self-defense, but his lawyer told him you never know what a jury might do. So he was pretty jumpy yesterday morning. Man, Jaffee was one sorry character, and that's why I couldn't understand the change."

"What change?"

"The change in his mood. All morning he's got a long jaw, his face at half past six, and then suddenly he's walking on air, laughing and full of jokes."

"When did this happen?"

"Right after we got that stewardess."

"What stewardess?"

"The one from Global Airlines." He made a face. "Poor kid. She had taken one of those airport limousines from Kennedy and it dropped her

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off at Grand Central. She was crossing Lexington when the taxi clipped her. Boy, he must've been moving. She was a mess. Jaffee didn't think she'd make it. I don't know what he did back there, but he was working on her, oxygen, needles, everything, until we got her to Emergency. It was after he came out and hopped aboard for another call that I noticed the change. It was weird. Nothing chewing at him any more. Smiling from ear to ear."

"Do you remember the girl's name?"

"Korth, Alison Korth. I remember because Doc Jaffee was so busy helping the Emergency team I had to fill out the forms."

He swung the ambulance east one block, cut the siren, turned up a ramp, and ran back to help wheel the patient through a pair of swinging doors, where people were waiting to take over. A formidable-looking nurse blocked my path and ordered me to wait in the reception lounge.

I sat among gloomy-faced people, thinking about young Jaffee. The obvious assumption was that his bookie, a man named Big Sam Tarloff, couldn't sit back idly and do nothing after one of his collectors had been so injudiciously handled by a deadbeat. People would laugh. Under the circumstances, how could he keep potential welshers in line? So he would have to make an example of Jaffee.

I was restless and fidgety. Curiosity precluded inactivity. So I got up and wandered over to the reception desk and asked the girl for Miss Alison Korth. She consulted her chart.

"Room 625."

I took the elevator up and marched past the nurses' station, found the number, and poked my head through a partially open door. The girl on the bed was swathed in bandages, eyes closed, heavily sedated, left arm and right leg in traction, her face pitifully dwindled and grey.

A voice startled me. "Are you one of the doctors?"

I blinked and then saw the speaker, seated primly on a chair against the wall. She looked drawn and woebegone.

"No, ma'am," I said.

"Well, if you're another insurance man from the taxi company, go away. We're going to retain a lawyer and you can talk to him."

"That's the way to handle it," I said. "Are you a friend of Alison's?"

"I'm her sister."

"Stick to your guns. Don't let any of those clowns try to pressure you into a hasty settlement."

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She stood up and came close, her eyes dark and intense. "Did you know Alison?"

"No, ma'am."

"Who *are* you?" I gave her one of my cards and she looked at it, frowning. "Scott Jordan. The name sounds vaguely familiar . . . but we haven't asked anyone for a lawyer. Are you an ambulance chaser?"

"Hardly, Miss Korth. I don't handle automobile liability cases."

"Then who do you represent?"

"Dr. Allan Jaffee."

"The intern who treated Alison in the ambulance?"

"Yes."

"He's very nice. He looked in on Alison several times yesterday while I was here." Her frown deepened. "I don't understand. Why does Dr. Jaffee need a lawyer?"

"It's a long story, Miss Korth. I'd like to tell you about it over a cup of coffee. There's a rather decent cafeteria in the building." She looked dubious and I added, "There's nothing you can do for your sister at the moment, and the hall nurse can page you if anything develops."

She thought for a moment, then nodded and accompanied me along the corridor to the elevator, stopping briefly to confer at the nurses' station. The elevator door opened and a man stepped out. He stopped short.

"Hello, Vicky."

"Hello, Ben," she said without warmth.

"How is Alison?"

"About the same," she replied.

"Has she regained consciousness?"

"Just for a moment, but they gave her some shots and she's sleeping now. She shouldn't be disturbed."

He lifted an eyebrow in my direction, a tall, blunt-featured man with dark curly hair, wearing sports clothes. Vicky introduced us.

"This is Captain Ben Cowan, the co-pilot on Alison's last flight. Scott Jordan."

He nodded frantically. "Were you just leaving?"

"We're on our way to the cafeteria," I said.

"May I join you?"

"I think not," Vicky said. "Mr. Jordon and I have some business to discuss."

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He registered no reaction to the rebuff. "I see. Well, would you tell Alison I was here and that I'll look in again?"

"Of course."

Going down in the elevator there was no further dialogue between them. Captain Cowan left us on the lobby floor and we descended to the lower level. I brought coffee to a small corner table.

"You don't seem overly fond of the captain," I said.

"I detest him."

"Is he a close friend of Alison's?" I pursued the thought.

She made a face. "Alison's infatuated, crazy about him. And I don't like it one tiny bit. I think Ben Cowan is bad medicine."

"In what way?"

"Call it instinct, feminine intuition. Alison and I have always been very close. She shares my apartment whenever her flight lays over in New York. She started going with Cowan about a year ago and she's been moonstruck ever since, sort of in a daze. She used to confide in me. But now, since Ben, she's become withdrawn, even secretive. Alison's not very practical. She was always naive and trusting and I worry about her. And now this—this—" Her chin began to quiver, but she got it under control and blinked back tears.

I sipped coffee and gave her time to recover. After a while, in a small rusty voice, she asked me about Allan Jaffee. So I told her about the gambling debt, the fight and the assault charge, and his failure to appear in court. I told her about going to his apartment and finding him half dead from a merciless beating. Vicky was shocked, but it took her mind off Alison only briefly. She grew fidgety, so I took her back to the sixth floor and then went down to find someone who could brief me on Jaffee's condition.

I spoke to a resident who looked stumbling tired and furiously angry; tired because he'd been working a ten-hour tour and angry because they kept him repairing damages inflicted by people on people. "I'm sorry, sir," he told me. "Dr. Jaffee can talk to no one."

"Not even his lawyer?"

"Not even his Maker. For one thing, his jaw is wired. For another, we've got him under enough sedation to keep him fuzzy for twenty-four hours."

"Will he be able to write?"

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"Yes. After a couple of fractured fingers knit properly. Try again in a couple of days."

A couple of days might be too late and I was in no mood to wait. So I went out and was waving for a cab when a hand fell on my shoulder. It was Captain Ben Cowan of Global Airlines.

"I'm sorry if I seem persistent, Mr. Jordan," he said. "But I'm terribly worried about Alison and I can't seem to get any information at the hospital. Everything is one big fat secret with those people. I thought, since you're a friend of Vicky's, you might know something."

"Why don't you ask her yourself?"

He looked rueful. "Vicky and I aren't on the same wavelength. I don't think she likes me."

"Well, the fact is, Captain, I don't have any information myself."

"Haven't the doctors told Vicky anything?"

"We didn't discuss it. I don't know either of the girls very well, Captain. I met Vicky only today."

"Oh?" A deep frown scored his forehead. "Vicky gave me an entirely different impression. I thought you'd gone to the hospital to see her."

"Not her. A client of mine."

"A client?" he said, puzzled.

"I'm an attorney. I represent the intern who treated Alison at the accident."

"Jaffee?"

"Right. Dr. Allan Jaffee."

"Well, then, I guess you can't be much help."

"Afraid not," I agreed as a cab pulled up in answer to my signal.

Tarloff's was a secondhand bookstore on lower Fourth Avenue, a large and profitable establishment stocking a few splendid first editions and managed by the owner's brother-in-law. On the second floor Sam Tarloff operated a frenetically busy horse parlor with half a dozen constantly ringing telephones manned by larcenous-eyed employees. Big Sam, a heavy, bear-shaped man with an incongruously seraphic smile, sat on a platform watching everything and everybody.

He recognized me and said cordially, "Well, Counselor, good to see you. Let's use my private office." I followed him into a small room. He beamed at me. "And what is your pleasure, Mr. Jordan?"

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"Nubile young cheerleaders," I told him. "Right now, however, I would like to see your hands."

"What for?"

"Come off it, Samuel. You know as well as I do that Dr. Jaffee's in the hospital."

"Where else should he be? He works there."

"Not as an employee at the moment. As a patient."

"What happened to him?"

"Somebody clubbed him half to death. I want to see if you have any bruised knuckles."

"Me? You think I did it?"

"You, or one of your men. It's a logical conclusion."

"Because he hurt one of my employees?"

"That, yes, and because he still owes you money."

"You're wrong, Counselor. He doesn't owe me money. He paid off last night, every cent, in cash, including interest."

"Samuel, I'm an old hand. Where would Jaffee get that kind of money on an intern's salary?"

"Not my business, Counselor. I gave him a receipt. Ask him."

"He can't talk. His jaw is wired."

"So look in his pockets. He's got it somewhere."

After countless hours of grilling people on the witness stand, you develop an instinct for the perjurer. Tarloff was not lying. I believed him. "You have lines out, Sam. Tell me, who do you think worked him over?"

He turned up a palm. "I don't know. But it was in the cards, Counselor, it had to happen sooner or later. Jaffee is a very reckless young man. He gambles without capital. Who knows, maybe he was into the Shylocks for a bundle too. I'll ask around if you want."

"I'd appreciate that."

"How about a little tip, Counselor, a filly in the third at Belmont? Only please take your business to an Off-Track Betting window."

"Not today, Samuel. May I use one of your phones?"

"Be my guest."

I rang Manhattan General and got through to Vicky Korth in her sister's room, still keeping the vigil. I asked her if Alison was close to anyone else at Global. She gave me a name, Ann Leslie, another stewardess, who generally stayed at the Barbizon, a hostelry for single females. Vicky offered to phone and tell her to expect me.

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I found Ann Leslie waiting in the lobby, a slender girl, radiating concern, wanting to know when she could visit Alison.

"In a couple of days," I said.

"Darn!" She made a tragic face. "We're flying out again on Wednesday."

"Where to?"

"Same destination. Amsterdam. Same crew too, except for Alison. I'll miss her."

"I imagine Captain Ben Cowan will miss her too."

She squinted appraisingly. "You know about him?"

"Vicky told me. And she's not happy about it."

Ann Leslie tightened her mouth. "Neither am I. That Cowan—he's a chaser, a womanizer. He uses people. He made passes at me too, before Alison joined the crew, but I wouldn't have any part of him. I just don't trust him. Have you met Ben?"

"Yes. He seems genuinely fond of Alison."

"It's an act, believe me."

"Is he openly attentive to her?"

"They're not keeping it a secret, if that's what you mean."

"Would you know why he didn't accompany her into Manhattan yesterday when you put down at Kennedy?"

"Yes. Because he was held up at Customs. They wanted to talk to him in one of those private rooms. I was there and I heard him tell Alison to go ahead without him and that he'd meet her later."

"Are members of the crew usually held up at Customs?"

"Not as a rule. They never bothered me. But it couldn't have been much because I know he's flying out with us again on Wednesday, on our next flight."

We talked for a while longer and I thanked her and promised to tell Alison that Ann would be in to see her as soon as the doctors permitted it. I left and cabbed over to Jaffee's apartment. The super recognized me and let me in.

I stood and surveyed the chaos. Nothing had been left untouched. Even the upholstery had been razored open and kapok strewed over the floor. Desk drawers were pulled out and overturned. I hunkered down, sifting through papers. I didn't find any receipt from Sam Tarloff, but after about an hour I did find something even more interesting: a duplicate deposit slip from the Gotham Trust, bearing yesterday's date, and showing a deposit of $34,000.

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I straightened and took it to a chair and stared at it, wondering how Jaffee, presumably broke, without credit, could manage a deposit of that magnitude. I saw that it wasn't a cash deposit. The $34,000 was entered in the column allotted to checks.

But a check from whom? And for what? As I studied it, I felt a sudden surge of excitement, of anticipation, because the Gotham Trust was my own bank, an institution in which I had certain connections. Bank records aren't quite as inviolate as most people believe.

Twenty minutes later I marched through the bank's revolving doors and approached the desk of Mr. Henry Wharton, an assistant vice-president for whom I had performed a ticklish chore only four months before. He rose to shake my hand. Then he sat back and listened to my request. He frowned at Jaffee's deposit slip and rubbed his forehead and looked up at me with a pained expression.

"Well, now, Mr. Jordan, this is highly irregular."

"I know."

"It isn't the policy of this bank to make disclosures about our depositors."

"I know."

"You're making it very difficult for me."

"I know."

He sighed and levered himself erect and disappeared into some hidden recess of the bank. I waited patiently. He was perspiring slightly when he returned. He cleared an obstruction from his throat. "You understand this is strictly confidential."

"Absolutely."

He lowered his voice. "Well, then, according to our microfilm records the deposit was made by a check drawn to the order of Dr. Allan Jaffee by the firm of Jacques Sutro, Ltd. I assume you recognize the name."

"I do indeed. And I'm deeply indebted, Harry."

"For what? I haven't told you a thing."

"That's right. Now would it be possible for me to get a blowup of that microfilm?" He turned pale and a convulsive shudder almost lifted him out of the chair. I added quickly, "All right, Harry, forget it. I'm leaving."

He was not sorry to see me go.

Mr. Jacques Sutro is a dealer in precious gems, operating out of the

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elegant second floor of a Fifth Avenue townhouse. Sutro, a portly specimen with silver hair and a manner as smooth as polished opal, folded his beautifully manicured hands and listened to me with a beautiful smile that displayed some of the finest porcelain dentures in captivity.

"And so," I concluded, "as Dr. Jaffee's attorney, I would appreciate a few details about any transaction you had with him."

"Why not discuss it with your client?"

"I would if I could, Mr. Sutro. Unfortunately, Dr. Jaffee had an accident and he's a patient at Manhattan General under very heavy sedation. It may be days before he can talk. In the meantime I'm handling his legal affairs and it's imperative for me to fill out the picture."

Sutro pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Would you mind if I called the hospital?"

"Not at all. Please do."

He got the number, spoke into the mouthpiece, listened intently, then nodded and hung up. He spread his fingers. "You must understand that I knew young Jaffee's father before the old man died."

"So did I, Mr. Sutro. As a matter of fact, he took me into his office when I first got out of law school. That's why I'm interested in the son's welfare."

"I see. Well, the old gentleman was a valued customer of mine. He purchased some very fine pieces for his wife when she was alive. And later he even acquired some unset stones as a hedge against inflation. Young Allan liquidated them through my firm after his father died. Then yesterday afternoon he came here and offered to sell some additional stones he had inherited."

"Merchandise you recognized?"

"No. But young Jaffee assured me his father had bought gems from various other dealers too. I examined the pieces and offered him a very fair price."

"How much did you offer?"

"Forty thousand dollars. He said he needed some cash right away, an emergency in fact, and that he couldn't wait for my check to clear the bank. He said if I let him have four thousand in cash he'd knock two thousand off the total price. So I gave him the cash and a check for the balance, thirty-four thousand." Sutro looked mildly anxious. "Nothing wrong in that, is there, Counselor?"

I shrugged noncommittally. Within a very short time, Mr. Sutro, I

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suspected, was due for a severe shock, but I was going to let someone else give it to him. He was chewing the inside of his cheek when I left.

What I needed now was Vicky Korth's cooperation. I went looking for her at the hospital but she wasn't in Alison's room and neither was Alison. The room had been cleaned out, the bed freshly made; there was no sign of any occupancy. I felt a cold, sinking sensation and headed for the nurses' station.

Two girls in white were on duty. My inquiry seemed to upset them both. Their response was neither typical nor brisk. Alison Korth had suddenly developed serious respiratory problems and despite all efforts they had lost her.

I had no way of knowing whether Vicky wanted to be alone or would welcome company. My own experience led me to believe that most mourners crave the solace of visitors. I checked her address in the telephone directory and rode uptown.

Vicky answered my ring and opened the door. The shock of Alison's death hadn't yet fully registered. She looked dazed and numb and she needed a sympathetic ear.

"Oh, Scott," she said in a small trembly voice, "it didn't really have to happen. They were careless—"

"Who?" I asked.

"The nurses, the doctors, somebody—"

We sat down and I held her hand. "Tell me about it."

"She—she was having trouble breathing and they put her in oxygen. It's my fault. I left her alone. I went down for a sandwich and when I came back I saw something was wrong. Her face was dark. I saw that the equipment had come loose, the tube from the oxygen tank, and Alison was—was—" Her eyes filled and she hid her face against my chest.

I said quietly, "You couldn't have anticipated anything like that, Vicky. You mustn't condemn yourself for lack of omniscience."

After a while she sat back and wanted to reminisce, to talk about their childhood. She was touched by nostalgia and bittersweet memories. It was good therapy. She even smiled once or twice.

When she finally ran out of words I began to talk. I put her completely into the picture. I told her about my interviews, about my deductions and my conclusions. I told her Alison had been used and that I needed her help—and told her what I wanted her to do.

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She sat quietly and brooded at me for a long moment, then she got up and went to the telephone. She dialed a number and said in a wooden voice, "This is Vicky. I thought you ought to know, Alison died this afternoon. I'm calling you because she'd want me to. The funeral is Thursday. Services at Lambert's Mortuary— Oh, I see. Well, if you wish you can see her in the reposing room this evening. I made arrangements at the hospital when they gave me a package with Alison's things. I'll be there myself at six. Please let her friends know."

It was almost seven o'clock. I sat alone in Vicky's apartment and waited. My pupils had expanded to the growing darkness. A large brown parcel lay on the coffee table. Behind me a closet door was open and waiting. Traffic sounds were muted. I kept my head cocked, concentrating, an ear bent in the direction of the hall door.

I was not quite sure how I'd play it if he came. I wasn't even sure he'd come, but then, without warning, the doorbell rang. It seemed abnormally loud. I didn't move. There was a pause and it rang again. Standard operating procedure: ring first to make sure no one's at home. I held my breath. Then it came, a metallic fumbling at the lock. I glided quickly into the closet, leaving the door slightly ajar, giving me an adequate angle of vision.

Hinges creaked and a pencil beam probed the darkness. A voice called softly, "Vicky, are you home?" Silence. Overhead lights clicked on. He came into view and I saw his eyes encompass the room in a quick circular sweep. He walked to the coffee table, picked up the parcel, and tore open the wrapping. He spread out the contents, staring at Alison's clothes.

"It's no use, Cowan," I said, showing myself. "You won't find them here."

His head pitched sideways and he stood impaled, jaws rigid.

I said, "You're one miserable, gold-plated, card-carrying, full-time rat. Conning a naive and trusting little cupcake like Alison Korth into doing your dirty work."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"That's a dry hole, Cowan. Step out of it. You know what I'm talking about. Diamonds. Unset stones from Amsterdam. Your moonlighting sideline as a co-pilot on Global. You suspected you were under surveillance and you got Alison to smuggle a shipment off the plane and into the

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country for you. Concealed on her person. That's why you were clean when they fanned you at Kennedy yesterday."

His mouth was pinched. "You've got bats loose, Mr. Lawyer."

"Save it, Cowan. The deal was blown when Alison had an accident and was taken to the hospital. You thought the stones were discovered when she was undressed and you sweated that one out. But when nothing happened you began to wonder and reached a conclusion. The ambulance intern would have to loosen her uniform to use his stethoscope, so he must have found the stuff taped to her body. You checked him out and that's why you knew his name when I told you that the intern who'd treated Alison at the accident was a client of mine.

"You asked me what happened to him. Why did anything have to have happened to him? I'd go to the hospital if I wanted to see him because he worked there, wouldn't I? But you already knew what happened because you made it happen. You broke into his apartment to search for the loot and you heard him come back and you ambushed him. You hit him from behind, but Jaffee's not an easy man to cool, and even wounded he fought back. I don't know, maybe you even had help. Maybe you tried to make him talk."

Cowan stood like a statue carved out of stone.

"You got nothing from Jaffee," I said, "and nothing from his apartment. So maybe you were wrong about him. Maybe Alison had concealed the stones somewhere in her clothes and nobody had found them. That's why you came here tonight after Vicky told you she'd brought Alison's belongings back here to the apartment. You had to find out, and you knew Vicky would be at the mortuary."

He took a step toward me.

"Careful," I said. "You don't think I'd tackle a murderer by myself."

"Murderer?"

"Yes, Cowan. I'd make book on it. You're a shrewd specimen. You had to cover all contingencies. Suppose the hospital *had* found the diamonds and *had* notified the cops and they were keeping a lid on it until they could question Alison. A girl like her, she'd melt under heat. They could turn her inside out. She'd make a clean breast of it, and you'd be blown. So she had to go. She had to be eliminated. So you loitered and waited until you saw Vicky leave, and then you managed to skip into Alison's room and tamper with the equipment. You cut off her oxygen and watched

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her die. The cops know what to look for now and they're checking the hospital equipment thoroughly for your prints."

That tore it. He thought he could cut his losses by splitting, so he whirled and slammed through the door. But I hadn't been kidding. The cops were all set for him outside in the corridor.

It seldom comes up roses for all.

Vicky lost her sister, but gained a suitor—me. U.S. Customs descended on Jacques Sutro and seized the smuggled diamonds. Sutro's lawyers attached Jaffee's bank account and recovered the $34,000 check he had deposited. Mr. Sutro still wanted his four-grand cash and I referred him to Big Sam Tarloff. Fat chance.

Allan Jaffee healed nicely. The episode may even have cured his gambling addiction. He copped a plea on the gem charge and turned State's evidence against Ben Cowan. Cowan was going to be out of circulation until he was a rickety old man. For me, representing Jaffee was an act of charity. I never got paid.

Only Nick Papadopolous emerged unscathed. The judge canceled forfeiture of Jaffee's bail bond and Papa got his money back. He was delirious. He invited Vicky and me out to dinner. That was two weeks ago. We're still trying to digest the stuff.

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Miranda's Lucky Punch

by James Holding

If Miranda's father hadn't been a jockey, I don't suppose any of it would have happened. Because then we wouldn't have had that crazy horseshoe nail around the house. And we'd never have got that first unordered issue of *Architectural Quorum*.

For that's where the whole thing started, right there—when the first copy of that fancy architectural trade paper came to us in the mail. It had my name on it, and our address. The label was printed from a stencil, just as though I was a regular subscriber to the magazine.

But I wasn't, of course. How could I be? Just a shipping clerk at Doty's Brass Company? Miranda, my wife, could tell the difference between a Doric column and a Corinthian one from her high school course in ancient history, but that's as far as architecture went with her. And me, I wouldn't know an architrave or a pediment if one came up and bit me. Or an architect either, for that matter.

So you can see why Miranda and I were puzzled.

"A mistake," I said, glancing through the magazine that evening. "Some fool circulation kid got his subscriptions crossed. So enjoy it, Miranda. It's the only issue you'll ever see."

"One's enough," Miranda said. "I looked it over today."

"I'm with you," I said, tossing the magazine aside. "I'm glad they've got a nice new office building in Boston, like it says here, but let's hit the sack. I've had a hard day."

Our mail on the following day consisted of soap coupons, an invitation to vote for Joseph Walker for City Council, an ad from some insurance company, and two more magazines. One was called *Strife*. It was a picture magazine. The other was called *Destiny*, a big bulky job full of stories about American business. Each magazine carried my name and address stenciled on gummed labels.

I yelled into the kitchen loud enough for Miranda to hear over the

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sizzling of the hamburgers she was cooking, "Where'd these two magazines come from, Miranda? You didn't subscribe to them, did you?"

"No," she called back. Then, in an injured tone, "You know very well I wouldn't subscribe to expensive magazines like that without telling you."

"What it is then," I told her, "they're samples. The magazines must be on a sampling kick. It suits me. These two I can enjoy."

Miranda put the hamburgers on the table and said, "But it's pretty funny we'd get three samples in two days."

"In magazine circulation, anything can happen, baby," I said. "I know from our own house organ down at the plant. So let's eat. Maybe we'll get some more tomorrow." I laughed and tackled my hamburger.

I shouldn't have laughed. When I got home from the office, Miranda pointed to the top of the TV set and said, "Another one came today."

"*Sports Graphic*," I said with enthusiasm. I picked it up, uncovering my regular subscription copy of *Clime*, the weekly news note, beneath it. Almost unconsciously, my eye compared the gummed address labels on the two magazines. They were the same color. They were the same size. The type looked identical.

It didn't mean anything to me then. I called for my usual short beer before supper and sat down to enjoy *Sports Graphic*. Only after dinner did I get around to my weekly cover-to-cover readership of *Clime*. I consider it good business to keep up on the news. You never can tell when an alert well-informed shipping clerk might be promoted into Manufacturing.

I said to Miranda, "Our *Clime* subscription is going to expire soon. Renew it when you get the notice, will you?"

"I already have," she said. "A week or so ago. I'm sorry I did now. We might get it free, the way things are going."

"You sent them a check?"

"Yes. Along with the renewal card."

"Hey!" I said, struck by a sudden thought. "Maybe your renewal of *Clime* triggered these other samples we're getting."

"How could they?" Miranda asked.

I gathered up the copies of *Clime*, *Sports Graphic*, *Destiny*, *Strife*, and *Architectural Quorum* and opened each one to the page in the front that lists the editors and publishers and stuff like that. "Look there," I said. "All these magazines are published by the same outfit. Clime, Incorporated."

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"So what?" Miranda said defensively. She thought I was about to tell her she'd goofed somehow in renewing my subscription to *Clime*. She was right, absolutely.

"You dope," I said, "you must have subscribed to all these magazines when you sent that renewal card to *Clime!*"

"I certainly did not!"

"Didn't you check any little boxes on the card? Besides the one for *Clime?*"

"There weren't any boxes to check. Just to renew *Clime*, or not to. I checked 'renew' and sent the money."

"That's all?"

"That's all there was on the card, Jim. Honestly. Except for those little holes in it, like in our gas bill. You know."

"Yeah. But you must have signed us up somehow for all those magazines by mistake."

"I didn't!" Miranda was firm.

"Tell me about it, baby. Maybe I can figure out what you did wrong."

Miranda flashed me a scornful look. "I was sunning in the front yard when the mailman came. He handed me the mail. I came into the house for my father's letter opener. Then I went out again to open the mail.

I have to explain here about her father's letter opener. It was actually a big horseshoe nail that was made of stainless steel or silver or something, with Miranda's father's name engraved on it, and a date, and the words "Hurry Up." It was given to Miranda's father years ago when he was a jockey by the owner of a bay filly named Hurry Up, which won the Pimlico Special one year with Miranda's dad up. It was a kind of souvenir. And since it was about all Miranda's old man left her, she kept it around. She used it for a letter opener because its edges and point were plenty sharp enough for that.

"I sat down on the grass again and began to open the mail," Miranda went on. "There were quite a few envelopes—ads and requests for charity and stuff like that—and the renewal from *Clime*. I opened the first envelope. It was an ad. I put the rest of the mail down on the grass while I read the ad. Then a wind came up and the mail began to blow away, so I jabbed my horseshoe nail through it to pin it to the ground. Next I opened the renewal notice. When I saw what it was I checked it for renewal and wrote out a check and sent it back in the envelope they supplied. Now, Smarty, can you make something out of that?"

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I remembered what she'd said about the holes in the card. I said, "Yes, Miranda. I think I can."

"What?"

"I think you just gave me the Big Idea," I said.

"I did?"

"Yeah. That horseshoe nail you use for a letter opener is kind of square in cross-section, isn't it?"

"What's cross-section?" Miranda asked.

"When you push the nail through a piece of cardboard or something, it leaves kind of a square hole, doesn't it?"

"Sure. Like a horseshoe nail, silly. So what?"

"So when you punched the nail through the renewal card to pin it to the ground, you made a kind of square hole in the card, that's what."

"I still don't see—" Miranda began.

"Quiet, I'm thinking. O.K. You make a square hole in the card. It's already got a lot of square holes in it. They're punch holes, so the card can be sorted and read and filed or something by one of these mechanical brain machines they got nowadays. Computers."

I explained it to her because she's not quite as quick as I am. I said, "Your horseshoe nail made an *extra* hole in the renewal card, a hole just like the other holes that were already in it. So by adding that extra hole, you probably confused the mechanical brain machine that handles renewal cards in *Clime's* office. Your extra hole made the card drop into the wrong slot maybe. Like instead of dropping into the slot that says 'renew this guy's subscription to *Clime*,' it drops into a slot that says, 'Jackpot! Send this guy subscriptions to *all* our magazines.' You get it?"

Miranda nodded. "It sounds reasonable," she said.

"Reasonable!" I was excited. "It could be a darn miracle! One little extra hole in a card gets us free subscriptions to four expensive magazines, just like that! If I'm figuring right, we could get rich!"

Miranda shook her head. "But Jim, it's not honest, is it?"

I said, "Sure, it's honest. Anyway, not illegal, I bet. Who can throw you in jail for poking holes in your own mail? Nobody. No more than they could arrest you for cutting out paper dolls when you were a kid." I was on safe ground here. Miranda loved paper dolls. Still does. I said, "It's a really great idea, honey, and legal. Let's give it a chance, shall we?"

"Why not?" Miranda said. "It's really kind of fascinating, isn't it?"

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It certainly was fascinating, to say the least.

During the next few days, while I worked away at my desk in the shipping department at the plant, I gave it a lot of thought, and I came up with a couple of conclusions about Miranda's lucky punch.

First, I figured she'd been very lucky that the hole she punched in the renewal card was exactly the shape and size of the legitimate holes. That had been about one chance in a million. I'd have to do something to cut those odds. Second, I figured she'd been just as lucky to punch her hole in the card at exactly the right spot, so that it would feed into the computer without rejection and get processed by the machine all wrong. I thought I could cut the odds on that one too.

Anyway, the thing to do, first of all, was sit tight for a while to see if the next issues of those magazines came to us free through the mail. In the meantime, I took an old paper punch down to the plant and asked one of our machinists to convert the round punch into a rectangular one for me, about so big. And I showed him the size. I told him my nephew, in kindergarten, had asked for a punch that would make square holes instead of round ones in his paper chains—and didn't these progressive kindergarten kids these days give you a pain in the neck? He agreed they did, and had the punch ready for me in fifteen minutes.

Well, the second issue of the weekly magazines arrived on schedule the following week, and the third issue the week after. *Destiny* and *Architectural Quorum* were monthlies, so I'd have to wait another week or so to be sure about them. But I was too anxious to wait any longer. So I launched our first experiment.

We chose our hospitalization bill to begin on, the group insurance thing. The evening our notice came in the mail I took it over under the floor lamp, got out my square punch, and punched a lot of new holes at random on the card's return stub, which we're supposed to tear off and send back with the dough. Then I wrote out a check and mailed it in with the stub. My new punch holes were scattered around among the other holes and the printing on the stub so you'd hardly notice them at all.

Then I waited to see what would happen for three months. And when we got our next notice it showed that we had additional coverage at the same old rate! "That proves it!" I said to Miranda. "It works. I could kiss your father's old horseshoe nail!"

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Miranda was as excited as I was, although she didn't quite understand why I was so pleased to get surgical insurance free when I never had to go to a doctor. "What'll we try next, Jim?" she asked me, eager as a kid.

I was carried away by the thought of the fast free ride to wealth and prosperity we could take now. "We'll try them all," I said.

During the next six months, we punched lots of extra holes in about every punched communication we received or sent through the mail.

I punched holes in my paychecks and at the end of the third month I began, without any explanation, to get $125 a week instead of my uusual $72.50. I did ditto to the quarterly dividend checks I got on ten shares of stock in an agricultural company my mother had left me, and before long I began to get dividends on a thousand shares instead of ten.

I punched our gas bills, and all of a sudden one month I found myself paying as much to heat my five-room house as though I was nursing a twenty-room mansion through a tough winter.

But by punching holes in my electric-light bills, I got a saving of something over ninety percent on them, which was enough to keep me from losing heart over my big gas bills.

I put some extra punches on an application card for two seats to the annual Barbershop Quartet Singing Festival, and I got back through the mail for my six bucks fifty-eight three-dollar tickets in the orchestra circle, where we took care of a lot of long-standing social obligations.

Pretty soon the whole business had become a game to Miranda and me. We were living higher off the hog than we'd ever been able to do on my measly salary. We had to start using Form 1040 to report our income, and paying the extra taxes we owed each quarter, like millionaires. I began to take Miranda's sincere admiration of my brain power as my rightful due. I told her laughingly that I might set automation back a hundred years, but we'd have a chance to get really rich before some computer, smarter than the others, found out there was at least one guy around who was winning the battle between men and machines.

So finally I tried the big one. I put a fancy batch of punch holes on the return stub of my quarterly income-tax statement when the next payment fell due and sent in my check with the punch-drunk stub to the Internal Revenue Service. Nothing happened for six months.

Then I got a registered letter from the Internal Revenue Service. The letter explained that it had recently come to their attention that I had

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overpaid my income taxes by twenty-two thousand dollars and forty-seven cents, and a refund check in that amount was therefore enclosed, with apologies for its tardiness. Miranda and I went into shock.

"This is what we've been waiting for, Miranda," I said. "We'll buy travelers checks with the money and take off for Europe."

"Europe!"

"Sure. We've always wanted to see it. Now we can."

She gave me an argument. But I knew that a government error as big as this one would be nosed out sooner or later by the human part of the staff, even if the computers stood pat. So I laid down the law.

We applied for passports the next day. We bought passage on a ship to Italy. We rented our house on a year's lease. We bought twenty thousand dollars' worth of travelers checks. And when the day came, we went to New York on the train, stayed overnight at a nice hotel, and next morning went down to the dock where our ship was berthed.

As I put my foot on the end of the gangplank to go aboard a short fat fellow standing there touched my arm. "You Mr. James Warfel?" he said.

My heart skipped a beat and my spirits nosedived. Not now, I thought, not when we've got it almost made, for Pete's sake! "Yeah," I said.

"I'm Hobbs," the man said. He didn't offer to shake hands.

"From Internal Revenue?" I asked.

"No," Hobbs said. "F.B.I." He flashed a gold shield at me.

"F.B.I.?" I felt better. "What seems to be the trouble, Mr. Hobbs?"

"I'm afraid we can't let you leave the country today, Mr. Warfel. Orders from Washington. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is."

I said "Man, you're crazy! This is ridiculous! My wife and I are leaving for Europe. You can't possibly hold us here. What have we done?"

He looked with a slight leer on his fat face at Miranda. "Your *wife?*"

"Certainly my wife! Mrs. Warfel to you."

He grinned at me. "But you aren't married. That we know."

I said, "Married or not—and I am—why can't I go to Europe when I want to, like any other free American citizen with a passport?"

"Because," he said, "you're *not* a free American citizen. That's the point. You're a card-carrying Communist, an unregistered alien suspected of doing subversive work in the U. S. That's what our records show."

I lost my voice for a minute. Then I said, "Some records you've got, Mister! Anybody at home can tell you I was born in the U.S.A., lived here all my life, work for the Doty Brass Company, and don't know a

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Communist from a hole in the ground. Why, I'm a registered Republican in Coates County, Ohio!"

"To tell you the truth," Hobbs said, "we got the tipoff on you from the Republican Committee in your own county."

"See?" I said hotly. "I'm a registered Republican, just like I said. We even made a generous contribution to the Republican campaign fund last month." As soon as those words left my mouth, I gulped and looked at Miranda. She dropped her eyes.

"I know it," said Hobbs. "The punch card you sent in with your contribution to the Republican war chest made you out a Communist-party member, although you were contributing to the Republicans." He leered at Miranda again. "And unmarried too, I might add."

"Was that card processed by a computer?" I asked, ignoring the crack.

"Sure. And your party affiliation came up Communist." He grinned at me. "Your County Committee kept your money, but they sent your card along to Washington for us to check on you. We didn't need to go any further than your army service record—and the fact that you'd recently applied for a passport."

I saw it all now. I looked a question at Miranda and she nodded. Tears were shining in her eyes. "I did it, Jim," she murmured. "I'm sorry. But we were punching everything we mailed that already had punch holes in it and I thought I might as well punch that Republican card too."

I'd be cleared of the Communist tag, of course. But in the process everything else would come out. I was thankful we hadn't spent our travelers checks yet. Sure as taxes, I'd have to cough up that dough when they found out what we'd been up to, Miranda and I.

One thing was bothering me though. "You mentioned my service record. Were you kidding, or did *it* show I'm a Communist too?"

"Sure," said Hobbs, "we put it through our machines and you came out redder than Stalin, I don't mind telling you."

Well, I kind of lost my bounce then. And what was worse, I lost that nice feeling I'd been carrying around recently that I was some kind of hot-shot genius. Mr. Hobbs' last crack couldn't mean anything except one thing; some other underpaid slob like me, some anonymous clerk in the Army Records Office in Washington, had figured out Miranda's lucky-punch gimmick before I had. And he'd tried out the stupid idea on *my* army record card!

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Money To Burn

by Clark Howard

It had been snowing for two hours when Phil Madigan woke up at eight o'clock and looked out his hotel-room window. The sight of the grey overcast morning filled with calmly falling snow petrified him for a moment so that he could only stare at it dumbly, hardly believing it to be real. But it was real, all right; great big white snowflakes drifting down so serenely, already covering the sidewalks and street and parked cars below. Yes, it's real, all right, Madigan thought, a wide smile breaking across his face.

He turned from the window and hurried through the connecting bath into Sam's room. He had to tell Sam right away.

Sam Hooper was sound asleep when Madigan rushed in and shook him roughly by the shoulder. "Sam!" Madigan said urgently, "get up! It's snowing, Sam! It's here; the snow's here!"

Hooper, the older of the two by twenty years, did not have Madigan's capacity for coming fully awake the first thing in the morning. He had to prepare himself to face the world, and he did so now, twisting and grunting and yawning while his sleepy senses returned.

"What? What's here?" he said sourly.

"The snow, Sam!" Madigan repeated excitedly. "It's here! It's here!"

What Madigan was saying got through to Sam Hooper then and he forced himself awake, jumping out of bed and stumbling along with Madigan to the nearest window. Together they stared down at the main street of the little town, freshly whitened by the snow. They stared with eyes wide and mouths slightly agape, as if they had never before seen such a phenomenon. Then they looked at each other and smiled happily. It was here, they were thinking. The snow was here at last.

They had been waiting for this, the first snowfall, for more than three weeks. It usually came not later than the middle of October but this year it was way overdue, for today was the twenty-third. Hooper had been

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complaining for the last seven days, since the fifteenth came and went and no snow appeared, that he would wait only one more day and then ditch the job; but each day he decided to wait another, until now, finally, his patience had been rewarded. His eyes shone with an eagerness to get on with the work at hand.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Ten past eight," said Madigan.

"O.K., let's get things moving. You check with the weather bureau while I get dressed; then I'll get everything together while you get ready."

"Right." Madigan hurried back into his own room.

Hooper went into the bathroom, washed, and began a fast shave. He could hear Madigan on the phone getting the weather report. Their plans depended on the forecast. Madigan had assured him a hundred times that it would be favorable, that the first snowfall of the season was always a heavy one. It had better be, thought Hooper now, or we'll get caught just as sure as hell is hot.

He finished up and went back into his room and started dressing. Madigan came in a minute later, grinning like a cat with a mouse under its paw.

"We're set, Sam! Weather bureau says the snow is expected to continue for at least six more hours. I told you, didn't I, Sam? Didn't I tell you?"

"Yeah, you told me, kid."

"Hot dog! We're gonna pull it off, Sam. In a couple more hours we're gonna have money to burn!"

"Well, we ain't got it yet," said Hooper calmly, "and we won't have it if you don't get cleaned up so we can hightail it out of here."

"Sure, Sam, sure." Madigan hurried into the bathroom, humming to himself.

Crazy kid, thought Hooper. Acting like some college punk that just made the team. He'd better settle down or he's liable to get a bullet in his gut. Sticking up a bank is serious business.

Sam Hooper was the man to know, if anyone did, just how serious the robbing of a bank could be. This would be his seventh bank. He had made it away clean on four of them, had been caught on the other two. For the two on which he had been caught he had spent a total of fourteen years in Federal penitentiaries; five on the first, nine on the second. He was now forty-four years old and had thought he was finished with this strongarm stuff.

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For the past year, since getting out of Leavenworth, Hooper had led a quiet, law-abiding existence; he had a rented room, ate in cafés, and worked nine hours a day as a leather tanner, a trade he had picked up by courtesy of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. It wasn't much of a life for a guy like Sam, a guy who had lived it up in Miami and Mexico City, been used to fancy cars, fancy clothes, and fancy dames; but at least he was able to look a cop in the eye and not always have to be thinking about some job he could get busted for; at least he could lay down a twenty for change without worrying about the bill being marked; at least he could sleep nights. He hadn't been setting the world on fire, not by a long shot, but he had been doing all right.

And then the kid came along. Phil Madigan, his name was. A small-timer, a candy-store burglar. Madigan was a real sports enthusiast—skin diving, ice skating, skiing, the works. That was how he happened to run up on this job they were getting ready to pull. He had been up in the mountains for some winter sports the previous season and had come across a cabin high up toward the peaks. It was a little place, just one average-sized room, Madigan had told him, and it was so far up that it was isolated from the time the first snow fell until the spring thaw about four or five months later. It was owned by a real-estate company down in the town of Preston where Hooper and Madigan were now, and was rented out to fishermen during the trout season. A perfect place to hide out, Madigan had said the first time he and Hooper met.

The kid had been referred to Hooper by one of the few contacts Sam still retained in the underworld. Hooper had passed the word around that he was out of business, that he intended to make it as a square after his last bit in prison; but apparently he wasn't taken too seriously because Phil Madigan turned up at his room one night saying he had a hot bank job on the line and had been told to look up Sam Hooper.

Sam listened to the plan out of a mixture of professional curiosity and sheer boredom, after first making it plain that he had "retired." But the more he listened, the more interested he became. It began to sound as if the kid really did have a sweet one waiting to be picked. So he took down all the particulars of the job and told Madigan he would look it over and let him know in a few days.

For the next two nights he worked the plan over and over in his mind and on paper, trying to find some weakness in it, some flaw that would give him an excuse to dump it; but each time he went over it, he came

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to the same conclusion: it was a good, sound bank job that looked like it could be pulled off very nicely if handled properly. And even though it was a small-town bank, the take would probably be well worth the effort and risk involved.

Sam tried to think over the deal rationally. He knew if he got caught on another bank job he'd be in prison until he was an old, old man. But the temptation was just too much for him. He kept thinking how nice it would be to have a briefcase full of money in his hand and step on a plane for Acapulco again. In his mind danced pictures of new clothes, a shiny convertible, and blondes—great big blondes.

The great big blondes did it. Sam Hooper decided to go the route one more time.

He and Madigan began polishing up the plan. The most important detail—the getaway and hideout—had already been taken care of with the little cabin high up the mountain. The one big obstacle in hitting a bank in that area was getting down the winding mountain highway before a roadblock could be set up at the bottom. This was virtually impossible to do; that was why there had never been a stickup in any of the resort towns that circled the mountain. But Hooper and Madigan would eliminate that problem by going up instead of down. It's a perfect setup, Madigan had said. We pull the job on the day of the first snowfall, then beat it up to this cabin. Nobody'll ever think we'd do that. The place is snowed in for at least four months. All we have to do is sit it out until spring and then just kind of drift down through town one day like we were early fishermen. Before anybody can notice us, we'll be gone. Sure, it'll be dull and monotonous up there all alone for four months, but we can hold out. And in the spring, we'll have money to burn!

Hooper finished dressing and threw his extra clothes in a suitcase. Then he sat down on the bed and gave their guns a final check. They had a .410-gauge shotgun with a sawed-off barrel and two .38 revolvers. Each would carry a revolver; in addition Madigan would handle the shotgun while Hooper collected the money in the bank. Hooper also had a little .25 automatic he carried in his hip pocket as an extra precaution. That was his hole card, his kicker, in case somebody got the drop on them; not even Madigan knew he had it.

"Hey, snap it up!" he yelled to Madigan in the bathroom.

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The younger man came in, drying his face with a hotel towel. "All set and ready to get going," he said.

"There's your artillery," Hooper told him, strapping his own shoulder holster in place. "Are you sure everything's set in the cabin?"

"I told you, Sam, it's all ready. I made a final check last week. There's five hundred bucks' worth of food laid in; a six-hundred gallon tank of fuel oil; a radio, four decks of cards, about a thousand magazines I got secondhand in the city; and we got checkers, dominoes, Parcheesi—everything but a broad, an' I could have arranged that, too, if you'd let me."

"Sure, sure," said Hooper, "that's all we'd need. We'll be at each other's throats soon enough without having a dame to fight over. You don't know how it is being cooped up with the same guy day after day."

Madigan smiled. "We'll make it, Sam, I know we will. And when it's all over we'll have—"

"I know, I know," Hooper interrupted, "we'll have money to burn. Come on, let's get going or spring'll be here before we even get started."

Madigan got into his holster and rolled the shotgun up in newspaper. They both put on heavy Mackinaws, fur caps, and rubber overshoes. Then they got their luggage and went downstairs to check out.

The bank opened at ten. Five minutes later Hooper and Madigan pulled up outside and parked. They were driving a four-year-old coupe with heavy-duty snow chains on the rear tires. Getting out, they ducked their heads against the windblown snow and crossed the sidewalk to the bank entrance.

There were six people inside; three tellers, the manager, his secretary, and one customer. Madigan remained just inside the door, folding the paper back from the barrel of the shotgun so they could all see what it was.

"Don't anybody move!" Hooper ordered, leveling his .38. "This is a holdup!" His gaze swept across the three men in the teller cages. "If an alarm goes off, so does that shotgun, understand? Everybody just stand or sit right where you are and look down at the floor!"

When they were all very still, with Madigan moving the shotgun slowly back and forth in an arc that covered the whole room, Hooper slipped the .38 into his pocket and from under his coat drew out a large canvas bag which he quickly unfolded. He hurried behind the railing and me-

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thodically emptied the tellers' cages of all currency. Then he stepped over to the bank manager's desk and pulled the man to his feet roughly. "Get that vault open!" he ordered coldly.

The big thick outer door of the vault was already standing open. The manager fumbled with a ring of keys to open the barred inner door. When he finally got it unlocked, Hooper pushed him inside and made him sit in a corner while he systematically looted the bank's reserve safe. Looks pretty good, he thought, as he stuffed the sack with bundles of tens and twenties and a few stacks of fifties and hundreds.

Finished, he stepped back out and snapped, "All right, everybody into the vault! Come on, move!" He glanced at the big clock on the wall as the other five people filed into the vault. They had been in the bank about seven or eight minutes. Pretty good time, he thought.

Hooper slammed the barred door and locked everyone in the vault. "Take a look," he said to Madigan, hurrying toward the front door. Madigan peered out at the street; he saw nothing but swirling snow. "Looks O.K.," he told Hooper.

"All right, let's go!"

Madigan folded the newspaper back over the shotgun barrel, tucked it under his arm, and opened the front door. Hooper stepped past him out of the bank and went directly to the car. Madigan followed him, closing the door gently behind him.

In the car, Madigan tossed the shotgun on the rear seat and started the motor. Hooper kept the sack of money between his knees, his revolver ready on top of it. The windshield wipers threw the loose snow away, giving them each a picture of the street up ahead. It was nearly deserted. Madigan guided the car slowly away from the curb and down the street.

Five minutes later they were out of town and approaching the curve where the highway began its winding descent to the lowlands.

"How's it look?" Madigan asked excitedly, nodding toward the sack of money.

"Pretty good, I think," said Hooper. "Looked like maybe fifty or sity grand."

Madigan grinned and went back to concentrating on the road. Where the highway curved downward, they turned off into a gravel road almost hidden by the snow. Their chains crunched noisily and caught and the car lumbered up a slight incline. As they gradually moved upward from

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the highway, Hooper looked back and saw fresh snow already beginning to fill their tracks.

Fifteen minutes later they reached a ridge where the road leveled off momentarily. Madigan shifted to neutral and pulled on the brake. Hooper took a pair of binoculars from the glove compartment and they got out. Taking turns with the glasses, they looked back down the mountain. The first section of their tracks leading off the highway were now completely covered and there was a fresh layer of unmarked snow on the highway itself.

"Perfect," said Madigan. "Just like I told you, huh, Sam? First snowfall is always heavy."

"Just like you told me, kid," Hooper admitted. He turned his gaze upward. "How long will it take us to get to the cabin?"

"About three hours, from the looks of the snow."

Hooper turned back to the car. "Well, let's get going."

It was nearly two in the afternoon when the car pulled up the last steep grade and made the top ridge. They were high up now, in a primitive part of the great mountain range, where the sky looked strangely close to them, where there was nothing visible except snow-covered pine trees, where the air was exhaustingly thin, the cold sharp and painful.

Hooper looked back down the road. "Are you sure nobody can follow us up here?"

Madigan shook his head emphatically. "By the time the snow stops, this road and everything around it will be in drifts up to eight feet deep. And it'll stay like that until the spring thaw. It would be impossible for a car to even go down, much less come up."

Hooper looked around at the white wasteland on all sides of them. "Where's the cabin?" he asked.

"Just up ahead."

The car moved through snow already deep across the rutted, narrow little road, and crawled slowly around a thick group of trees into a small clearing. There, with three feet of snow drifted up against it, sat the little cabin.

"Home sweet home," said Madigan as he drove up as close as he could and cut the motor. They got out of the car.

"We'll have to dig our way in, looks like," said Hooper.

"Yeah." Madigan opened the trunk and took out two hand shovels.

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"How's that work?" Hooper asked, indicating the large fuel-storage tank mounted on a raised wooden platform next to the cabin.

"There's a line running into the cabin," Madigan explained. "It's got a regular tap like a water faucet. We use the fuel oil for our lanterns, for the stove, and for the heater."

"Sure there's enough to last?"

"Plenty," Madigan assured him. "Probably be a hundred gallons left in the spring."

The two men went to work clearing the snow away. When they got the door open, Madigan took the shovels and put them back in the trunk. "You grab the money," he said easily, "I'll unload the suitcases."

Hooper nodded and got the sack of money from the front seat. He went on inside and looked around. One corner was piled high with magazines. A table in the middle of the room had decks of cards and other games of amusement on it. There was a radio on a shelf on the wall. In a little alcove Hooper saw cases of canned goods and other supplies. There were two folding cots, each with three new blankets stacked on it. Between them was a large kerosene stove.

Not bad, thought Hooper, considering it's only a four-month stretch that we must hibernate.

The door slammed behind him and he turned to see Madigan putting their luggage on the floor. "Get the binoculars out of the glove compartment, will you, Sam?" the younger man said. "If we leave them out there the lenses will freeze."

"Sure, kid. Then let's get a fire going and warm the place up, what say?"

Madigan smiled. "Good deal."

Hooper went back outside and waded the snow over to the car. Opening the door, he reached inside and got the glasses. Have to get this car around back and get it up on blocks some way, he thought. Got to be sure and start it every day, too, so it won't freeze up. He closed the car door and made his way back to the cabin. There was a thermometer nailed to the wall just outside the door. Hooper saw it was only fifteen above zero. He shivered and pushed through the door.

Just as he stepped inside, Hooper felt the muzzle of the shotgun jab into his back. He stiffened and held his hands very still.

"That's the ticket, Sam," said Madigan evenly. "Don't even think about moving." He reached around under Hooper's coat and lifted the .38 from

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Sam's shoulder holster. "O.K., Sam," he said, pushing him away, "go on over there and sit down at the table and keep still so I don't have to blast you."

Hooper sat down, feeling the hardness of the little automatic in his hip pocket, very glad now that he had never mentioned to Madigan that he carried his "kicker," his "hole card." He stared coldly across the room at Madigan. "Double-crossing me, kid?" he asked in a measured tone.

"That's it, Sam," Madigan said, smiling.

"So you lied to me," Hooper accused quietly. "You said there was no way out of here until spring."

"I said there was no way with the car, Sam," Madigan corrected. The younger man picked up the sack of money and emptied it on the floor. Kneeling down, watching Hooper closely, he used one hand to stuff the currency into a knapsack. When it was packed, he slipped his arms through the shoulder straps, switching the shotgun from one hand to the other as he did so.

"What are you gonna do, hike down?" Hooper asked sarcastically.

"Little too cold for that, Sam," said Madigan lightly. He backed over to one of the cots and pushed the blankets off onto the floor. Beneath them lay a pair of shiny skis and matching ski poles.

"So that's it," said Hooper. "You're gonna ski down. A regular all-American boy, aren't you? Don't you think the law will be waiting for you when you get back down there?"

Madigan was kneeling on the other side of the cabin again, lacing on heavy ski boots. He continued to watch Hooper closely, the shotgun lying only inches from his hands.

"I'm not going that way," he told Hooper. "I'm going down the other side. There's a ski lodge down there. By tonight there'll be busloads of skiers up here. Nobody'll notice one more." He stood up, gathered his skis and poles under one arm, and leveled the shotgun on Hooper. "Outside, Sam," he ordered.

Hooper went back out into the cold, Madigan following him.

"Just stand over there by the door where I can keep an eye on you," said Madigan as he moved a few yards away from the cabin. Hooper watched while the younger man laid his skis in position on the level snow and knelt between them, cradling the shotgun first on one knee, then the other, while he fitted the skis onto his boots. Then he stood up and held the shotgun loosely under one arm.

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"You gonna kill me, kid?" Hooper asked, tensing himself for a drop to the ground to try and get the .25 out before Madigan could get him with a load of buckshot.

"What for, Sam?" Madigan said easily. "You never did anything to me."

"Aren't you afraid I'll come after you in the spring when I get out of here?"

Madigan laughed. "Go ahead, Sam," he said simply.

Hooper frowned as suspicion flooded his mind. It doesn't figure, he told himself. The first rule in pulling a double-cross is to make sure the guy you cross won't ever be able to get even. It's a trick, he decided. He's trying to get me off guard for some reason.

"I've got to cut out if I'm gonna make the ski lodge by dark," Madigan said. "You just go on back in the cabin, Sam, and stay put until I get gone. And don't try following me if you've got any sense; you'd never make it on foot. Understand?"

Hooper nodded.

"So long, Sam."

Hooper backed slowly toward the door, still expecting Madigan to raise the shotgun at any second. But the younger man made no attempt to fire; he just stood waiting while Hooper backed all the way into the cabin and quickly shut the door.

Watching through the window, Hooper saw Madigan swing first one, then the other ski around and move off slowly toward the first slope that would take him down the other side of the mountain. Hooper wet his lips and took out the little .25 automatic, snapping the safety off. He looked back out and decided that Madigan was now about a hundred yards away—too far to chance accuracy with the small bore weapon he had. Got to get closer to him, he thought anxiously.

He hurried to the rear of the cabin and climbed out the back window, dropping nearly waist-deep into a drift. Moving through the snow to the corner, he peered around and saw Madigan still moving smartly along on his skis, now about two hundred yards away. Hooper thought quickly and bolted from behind the cabin, running in a crouch until he reached the line of trees edging the clearing. The snow was not so deep under the trees and Hooper was able to move faster.

He began to run through the trees, staying back under their protective covering. He ran until his chest was heaving from the thin air that failed to satisfy his lungs; then he had to rest. He slowed to a walk and moved

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back toward the clearing. Looking out from behind a tree, he saw Madigan still about fifty yards ahead of him. He leaned up against the tree and counted slowly to thirty, then moved back under cover and started running again.

He ran until he judged himself to be ahead of Madigan, then slowed down and crept quietly back to the edge of the clearing. Madigan was just approaching the place where Hooper stood concealed. They were both almost to the edge of the slope now.

Hooper waited until Madigan went by, then stepped out behind him, the gun leveled. "Hold it, kid!" he said sharply.

Madigan tried to whirl around and raise the shotgun but he got his legs tangled in the skis and his arms in the ski poles, and he dropped the weapon and stumbled into a snowdrift helplessly.

Hooper stood over him laughing, the .25 aimed at his chest. "Outsmarted yourself, didn't you, punk?"

"Don't shoot me, Sam!" Madigan begged.

"I'm not," Hooper told him. "I don't want somebody finding you with a bullet in you and wondering how you got it. No, I'm going to take care of you in a different way, punk."

"Give me a break, Sam," Madigan pleaded.

"Sure, I'll give you a break," Hooper said coldly. He reached down and picked up the fallen shotgun by its barrel. Using it as a club, he smashed the stock against Madigan's skull. The younger man fell over unconscious.

"There's your break," Hooper snarled. "A break in the head."

He put the shotgun down and rolled Madigan over, pulling the money-filled knapsack from his back and removing the unconscious man's coat to take off the shoulder holster he wore. When it was off, Hooper took the other .38 from the pocket and worked the heavy Mackinaw back onto Madigan's limp form. Then he grabbed the collar of the coat and began to pull Madigan through the drifted snow, the skis and poles dragging behind him.

Stopping near the edge, Hooper surveyed the slope carefully. It fell in a gentle curving grade that angled off to the right and seemed to wind gradually down-mountain as far as he could see. That was the ski trail Madigan had meant to follow down to the lodge, he decided. But off to the left there was no gentle curve, no slope at all; there was only a steep

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incline that stretched about thirty feet to a sheer drop down into a deep gorge.

That looks O.K., Hooper thought dispassionately. He dragged the unconscious man farther along the edge until he had him right above the incline leading to the drop. There he laid Madigan out on his side, skis straight, poles still attached to his wrists with thongs.

"So long, double-crosser," he said softly, and with the toe of his overshoe he started Madigan down the slope.

Madigan's unconscious form slid downward, the drag of his skis slowing but not stopping him. He moved jerkily, his body weaving and leaving an odd trail in the snow. Seconds later he went over the edge and dropped from sight.

Hooper waited perhaps two minutes but he never did hear Madigan hit bottom. Either it's pretty damned deep, he decided, or else there's a lot of snow at the bottom. Either way it didn't really matter. If the fall didn't finish Madigan, he'd freeze to death before he woke up.

Hooper went back and got the shotgun and Madigan's shoulder holster and the packful of money, and trudged back toward the cabin. It was getting colder now and the light was beginning to fade. The evening air seemed even thinner than it had been earlier and Hooper had to stop twice to rest and catch his breath. When he finally reached the cabin, he saw on the thermometer that the temperature had dropped to two degrees below zero. He hurried on inside.

The cabin was as cold as the outdoors. Hooper was shivering as he put the guns and knapsack on the table and pulled off his gloves. His fingers were numb with cold. He blew into his cupped palms a few times and rubbed his hands briskly. Got to get a fire going, he thought. Got to warm this place up.

He lifted the lid of the stove and saw that it was dry inside. Picking up the kerosene can, he found it empty. He went over to the tap running in from the fuel tank outside and put the lip of the can under it. He turned the tap—and nothing came out.

Hooper stared at the dry nozzle, the empty can, the cold stove. No fuel, he thought dumbly. Then the panic began to rise in him. *No fuel—!*

Outside, the temperature was down another degree and dropping steadily.

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To Kill an Angel

by William Bankier

I remember the day the letter arrived and things started happening. I rode up on the escalator from the Peel Street Metro station and walked a block to the club on Stanley Street. The place was almost empty at eleven-thirty in the morning. Jonathan Fitzwilliam, the owner, known to most of us as Johnny Fist, was holding a crumpled sheet of note paper, squinting at whatever was written on it.

The Ninety-Seven Club is lit by small lamps on oak tables beside upholstered chairs. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves cover every wall. There are books stacked on the carpet, books piled on the mahogany bar and a few standing between the liquor bottles on the mirrored shelves. Many of them lay open. You can walk into The Ninety-Seven and find yourself first intrigued, then trapped, by a different book every day. Johnny Fist thinks this is a good thing.

Correction: you can't just walk into The Ninety-Seven. The club has a private membership which Johnny keeps to 100. His accountant, Mervin Stein, says this is bad business but Johnny says he wants room to breathe.

My name is Dennis Masterson. I am a professional singer with a half-hour radio show three days a week on the CBC, and I like to think of myself as Jonathan Fitzwilliam's best friend.

When I walked into the club, Johnny looked up from reading a paper in his hands, peering at me through lamplight. "Milligan is dead. Did you hear?"

"Yes. Killed by some dumb cop in New Orleans."

"Don't blame the cop. Milligan was running with a nasty pair." Johnny lowered this note that seemed to have him puzzled, forgetting it while he considered how our old friend had been conned. "They left a dead body in his bedroom."

"Well," I said, "there goes the ball team."

Milligan was a former pro baseball player who ran a restaurant on Ste.

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Catherine Street. The restaurant sponsored a team in the Snowdown Fastball League and a few of us used to have some fun on summer evenings, behaving gloriously on the diamond and then going and hoisting a lot of draft beer at the Texas Tavern.

But not any more.

I sniffed the air. "What's on for lunch?"

"Beef curry. Spinach pie."

Dallas came in from the supply room and struggled behind the bar with three cases of beer stacked in front of him. I moved onto one of the upholstered stools where I could relax and watch him work. "Hey," I said, "if you get a minute, you might open me a cold Guinness."

Dallas did, and as he poured the black beer, frowning below the headband that held back his thick blond hair, he said, "How about settling up your tab?"

"I'll clear it on Monday," I said, sipping my beer and wiping my upper lip. "I have a check coming for a couple of commercials."

Singing commercial music tracks was how I happened to meet Johnny Fist in the first place. A few years back, Johnny was the most popular English radio voice in Montreal. He got called on frequently by the ad agencies to do announcer tracks. So we showed up in the same studio quite often and we soon discovered we laughed at the same things.

So we ended up more than once around the same tavern table. One of these times Milligan joined us and graciously, or perhaps drunkenly, invited me to join the fastball team. I went along and booted a few easy chances at second base, absorbing the razzing, accepting the demotion to right field where I could do less harm. And all the time, Jonathan and I drifted closer together.

This was before the catastrophe that turned him upside down and almost buried him. In those days, Johnny had a wife and son, so part of our time togehter was spent in his apartment watching the golden girl spoon cereal into the golden baby while we sat at the kitchen table and played cribbage.

But I had better keep my mind on this story. It is too easy to slip back into what used to be with me and Johnny, which is not what is today.

I took my beer over to where he was tapping the sheet of note paper against his teeth and blowing across it with a rhythmic buzz like a Walt Disney bee.

"What *is* that thing you're playing with?"

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"Something very sad," he said, handing it to me. "And maybe dangerous."

It was a message scrawled in red pencil in the largest hand I have ever seen. I read the note twice.

"Dear Jonathan, For the sake of past friendship be my guide and help me perform the Lord's work. Let not the guilty go unpunished. The man's name is Sieberling, or maybe Emery Disco, and he lives somewhere in Montreal. With God's help, I will bring this evil-doer to justice. First we find him. Then we do what must be done. Don Cleary."

I handed the note back to Johnny. "Sounds like a religious nut. Where do you find your friends?"

Johnny did not smile. He held up a torn envelope.

"According to the postmark, this was mailed in Baytown over a week ago. The address isn't accurate so delivery was held up. Cleary may be in Montreal right now."

"Then he'll contact you."

"He may have tried while I was away. Dallas said there were a couple of phone calls but the guy wouldn't leave his name."

I thought about the name in the note—Emery Disco. It rang a bell. "Isn't Disco a member of the club?"

"That's right."

"How does your friend know that?"

"He doesn't. He just wants me to help locate the man. He assumes Disco is in hiding and he figures I know my way around Montreal."

"Sounds like a spy story."

"It's no joke. Disco did something to Cleary years ago." A key turned in the front door lock and a wedge of noonday sun clanged in. The luncheon crowd was beginning to arrive.

"We should have food, landlord, and fine wine." It was that manic, six-foot redhead, Noble Kingbright, come over from the agency with Linda Lennox. And he was in full cry, green eyes glittering, both rows of teeth unsheathed, heels pounding the floor, little Linda propelled along like a marionette at the end of one of his rangy arms.

"I'll tell you later about Cleary," Johnny said. "And remind me to telephone Disco and warn him."

Johnny confronted the newcomers and took Linda away from Kingbright, lifting her like a doll. Big as Kingbright is, he had to look up to my friend Jonathan.

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Linda and Johnny had been seeing each other for several months. She had come from Alabama a year before, following her boy friend who was evading military service. Linda is an advertising writer, one of the good ones, and she soon found a job at Parenti Agency where she makes a lot of bread. Her American friend, whose name I could never remember, was a dour stud hiding his light under a bushel of hair but he must have had something because Linda is no fool. Anyway, he decided to split and fly to Denmark but Linda liked the way Montreal was falling into line for her, so they parted his beard and kissed goodbye.

Enter Johnny Fist who saw something fine in the Lennox girl, sitting by herself nights at his bar, drinking sour mash bourbon and taking down the right books from the musty shelves. Maybe he always wanted a girl one quarter his size. Anyway, soon she was climbing the winding stairs to Johnny's apartment after The Ninety-Seven closed for the night. And our cribbage games became less frequent.

Now Johnny said, without looking at Kingbright, "Keep your hands off my woman, you red-headed, alien sonofabitch, or I'll punch large holes in your body."

He steered both of them to a table and said, "Sit here, have a drink on me, then have lunch on you. I recommend the spinach pie." And he was off towards the kitchen, glancing once again at Cleary's erratic note, folding it, tucking it into his back pocket.

Linda said to me, "Sit down, Denny. Have a bit of lunch with us."

I was not anxious to eat with these two. I liked Linda Lennox but her companion put me on edge so I said, "Save me a place, Linda. I have to settle up with Dallas." I went to where the bar angles out of sight of the main room behind an island bookshelf and called Dallas over.

"Got another Guinness back there?"

He fished one out of the cooler. "What's the matter with Johnny this morning?"

"Is something the matter?"

"The mail came and he opened this letter and got all edgy. Last time I saw a guy that nervous, it was alimony payments."

"It's a note from some old buddy back in Baytown. The way it's written he seems to be around the bend. I suppose Johnny is worried the guy is going to show up."

"That's all we need in this place, another screwball." Dallas looked out into the clubroom. From where he was standing he could see Linda's

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table and just then we heard Kingbright let go with one of his maniacal laughs.

"Beautiful," he boomed, using all ten cubic feet of chest capacity, "the gun becomes the hero! We build the whole film around the gun."

I could hear Linda trying to hush the man, to bring him back down to the tone of the room.

At this point, perhaps I should explain how Jonathan Fitzwilliam became financially independent. It was three years ago. Johnny's wife and baby were off to Winnipeg to spend a few days with her mother. I drove the car that took all four of us out to Dorval and I stood with Johnny at the gate as we waved them aboard the plane. I can still see those golden heads moving up the stairs in the jostling crowd, and I can feel the empty silence we took back with us to the car.

"Hey," I remember saying, "we're a couple of reckless young bachelors for the next few days."

Johnny did a high kick with one leg in the direction we were heading, hunching his shoulders and flapping his hands. "Which way to the vaudeville show?" he cried.

We heard the news bulletin on the car radio as we neared Montreal. The airplane had gone into a hillside five minutes after takeoff. I wanted to turn around and head back to Dorval but Johnny kept me heading straight. He was like a closed door.

"She's dead," he said. "They're both dead."

We went to the radio station and watched the Telex and he was right, they were all dead, everybody aboard the airplane. Johnny's fellow workers whispered around, some of them coming to him in tears, and through it all he was like the crown of an iceberg floating in a dead calm sea.

That's how he remained when he learned she had taken out two life insurance policies, each one worth a hundred thousand dollars. The company paid and the money went into the bank and Jonathan did not refer to it.

Then one day he came into the studio at six o'clock to do his morning show. He had a Church of England hymn book and began reading it on the air, starting with page one. When the engineer joined him at 7:00 and answered the screaming telephone, Johnny was attending to nothing else—no music, no commercials, no time checks, no sports scores or weather.

The engineer did what the station manager told him to do over the

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telephone. He put on a musical feed from the control room. Then he went into the studio to tell Johnny he could stop now, but Johnny paid no attention. I was not there, but the way they tell it he was still reading when the manager showed up at nine and when the boss tried to close the hymn book, Johnny bloodied his nose with a backhand.

That brought in the cops and it ended with the studio turned into a room full of kindling and broken glass and with Jonathan Fitzwilliam being taken away in restraints.

He spent a month in the Allen Memorial talking to the doctors and responding to medication. Then he came out, calm and apologetic, and threw away the pills they had given him, switching to booze. Then he disappeared and we thought our old friend had switched cities. But Mervin Stein, who was doing Johnny's personal income tax in those days, checked the bank and found the $200,000 was still there.

For a while we speculated foul play, or even suicide, but a body that size has to show up. And it did, six months later in New York City. The shipped him home under sedation with a big-armed male nurse, all at the radio station's expense. This time my friend was released from the Allen a very healthy man. He was wide open now, absolutely in touch with reality, and ready to resume his life.

"Lenore would think I was pretty stupid," he told me, using his wife's name as if she were in the next room, "leaving all that money in the bank. I'm going to talk to Koshe about a thing I have in mind."

Koshe was Johnny's nickname for Mervin Stein. They did talk, about buying a failed second-hand bookshop on Stanley Street and putting it on a sound business footing as a private club, reading room, drinking and eating place, chess parlour and occasional dance hall. In surprisingly short order it all happened, and they called it The Ninety-Seven. Johnny explained the name to me. "You know, Den, it wasn't just my wife and son who died in that air crash. Ninety-seven souls all went together. I'm not the only one who lost people that day." Later, he harked back to the point. "Don't every worry about dying, old sod. You won't be alone. It's you and me and everybody who ever lived."

Johnny's smile when he told me this was like afternoon sunshine at the ball park.

So much for my friend leaving the radio business and becoming an independent club owner. You should also know how he got his nickname.

There used to be a late-evening radio show from the lounge of a jazz

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club called The Riverboat, and it was chaired by Jonathan Fitzwilliam. He would play records from his private collection of Basies and Luncefords, and even an occasional Bing Crosby from the early years when the man was really singing. One night Johnny was talking on the air to Arnie Pender, the club owner. I remember it well; I was schlepping a free drink at the celebrity table. Suddenly we all became aware of an obnoxious patron with a sweating face and a tight blue suit who was leaning into the interview. I remember what he said. He said,

"Hey faggot. Did you hear about the two queer radio announcers? Jonathan Fitzwilliam and William Fitzjonathan."

Johnny didn't even stand up. He just drew back and drove a ten-inch right-hand jab into the dimple in the protruding jaw. The heckler went down into an empty chair, head lolling, then slid out of the chair onto his knees, a slow, heavy decline onto the floor face down, like a rolled-up carpet collapsing.

After the applause, Arnie Pender produced a label that would last forever. "Never mind Jonathan Fitzwilliam," he said. "You should be called Johnny Fist."

Anyway, enough with the ancient history. Back to what was happening at The Ninety-Seven at lunch hour on this hectic afternoon. Dallas was pushing plates of beef curry across the counter and I wanted mine. I took a plate, went looking for a place to sit and found myself back where I did not want to be, across the table from Noble Kingbright with Linda on my left.

"That curry is hot stuff," Kingbright said. He went to get us another round of drinks which I, for one, did not want. But go argue with Hyperhost.

I looked at Linda. She has a funny way of drinking; she takes a swig, makes a face of mild disgust and then sets the glass down with an abrupt thrust away from her, turning her head at the same time as if that is definitely the last taste of booze she will ever tolerate. But a minute later, she is doing the same thing. I wanted to get her talking because Linda Lennox's speech is in the beguiling cadence of the Deep South. I'd pay to listen to her.

"Well then," I said, "how goes the battle?"

She looked at me; sparkling black eyes in a sweet, round face. "I just wish you would ask Jonathan to keep his hands off Noble."

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She pronounced the word "hayunds." I relished it. "You felt the tension too?" I said.

"I declare, it's like the overture to World War Three when those two confront each other. And there's no use my speaking to Jonathan about it. He will not listen to me on the subject in any way, shape or form."

"You have to admit your friend comes on strong."

"Well he does, yes. But that's because he's a creative individual and at the moment he happens to have a very important project on his mind."

On his maaahnd . . . a sweet, hypnotic syllable. Then Kingbright came back with the drinks and broke the spell.

"That's right. I am into an original suspense film in which the pistol, the murder weapon, is the star," he said. "And I know just the pistol to use. A most photogenic weapon, all long and sexy and heavy in the hand."

"I didn't know you were a feature-filmmaker," I said. "I thought you produced TV commercials."

"For wages. Unfortunately, the family income to which I am entitled through blood is denied me on the grounds of a technicality. My baronial, Teutonic father chose not to honor my mother with a wedding ceremony."

I said, "You'll need tons of money to make a film."

"Ve haf vays of gettink ze necessary funds," Kingbright said, leaning back in his chair, eyelids lowered, letterslot lips spread in a slashing smile.

"I wish you luck." I glanced at Linda, who was watching Kingbright's performance with cold eyes. If the man was going to approach a backer for support, it was to be hoped he would sober up first.

The lunch crowd dispersed and it was after two o'clock when I got back to Johnny about the troublesome note. We were upstairs in his apartment above the club, Johnny with the telephone on his lap and a roster of club members in his hand. I was holding his guitar against my chest, plucking a few chords.

"I was hoping Disco might come in for lunch," he said, dialing. "I'd better call him."

"What is this Cleary thing?"

"It happened years ago, before I left Baytown and came down here. Cleary was a cop, the best man on the force. He could have gone on and become Chief if he'd wanted to stick at it. Hell, he could have run for Mayor—he was one of those guys you have to admire. Then this hassle happened with Disco."

"What hassle?"

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"It's a long story. I'll tell you when . . ." I heard a natter of response on the phone. "Hello, Emery? It's Johnny. Where are you keeping yourself these days?"

They small-talked for a minute or so and then Johnny filled the man in on the note he had received. Disco seemed to treat it as a joke. I could hear him laughing. By the time the call ended, Johnny had agreed to come up to the house later in the afternoon and talk about how they should handle the situation.

Johnny emphasized his warning. "You may think you know Don Cleary from that one exposure to him, Emery. But believe me, I know him better. He's a stubborn guy."

We got out the cards and killed an hour with the cribbage board. Then my friend got up, a tailored mountain rising into the air. "Come on, let's go have a splash in Emery Disco's swimming pool. We've been invited."

"You've been invited."

"Wherever I go," he said, "you go. Damon and Runyon."

So I went with Johnny Fist on that hot, hazy afternoon and we flagged a taxi. Then we headed up Cote des Neiges onto the shaded plateau of Upper Westmount. Disco's house on Cherry Hill Crescent was concealed by leafy maples, but what we could see of it was grey stone and leaded glass and rich, grainy oak. We walked along the winding flagstone path, listening to the wealthy hush of summertime. There were no growling trucks in this neighborhood, no pedestrians, no kids screaming in the street. Even the grasshoppers kept their activity down to a respectful strum, and the birds whispered.

"How the other half lives," I murmured.

"You mean the other two percent," Johnny said.

He pulled the iron handle jutting from the stone wall beside the doorframe. Inside, at a distance, a well-tuned chime said, "Clong." A minute later it was my turn; a double clong.

"Let's look around at the back," Johnny said.

I followed him over a carpet of grass along the front of the house and between a high hedge and the side wall which was edged with petunias and marigolds.

"I wish you'd tell me what Disco did to your friend Cleary," I said. "I want to know how to act."

"It's a long story. He'll probably tell you himself better than I could."

We walked into the back yard and I closed the iron gate behind me.

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The area was enclosed on three sides by stone walls eight feet high, which were themselves masked by four poplar trees and one weeping willow which was in a position to cry a few leafy tears into the swimming pool. On the fourth side, the house stared down at us with what seemed like a hundred windows.

At first we thought the yard was empty and, in a sense, I suppose it was. There were a couple of deck chairs drawn up on the concrete patio beside the pool. There was a wicker-and-glass table with a paperback book on it and a pair of sunglasses.

"Emery?" Johnny said in what would pass around these parts for a loud voice. No answer, except a shiver passed along from one poplar tree to the others. Then we saw them in the pool.

I recognized Disco, even face down in the blue water surrounded by the red slick of his blood. He was wearing bathing trunks. The two women were fully dressed except for shoes. One had gray hair. The other was a younger person with long black hair fanning out on the surface of the water. All were floating with arms outstretched as though they were looking for something on the bottom of the pool.

The fourth corpse floated on its side, eyes open and tongue extended—a huge Alsatian dog.

"Good Jesus," Johnny said, "would you look at what he's done?"

"So you think Cleary got there ahead of us," I said. We were walking along Cedar Avenue with the city and the St. Lawrence River spread out below us, on our way back to the club on foot. After our session with the police and all the lifting of wet bodies from the pool, we needed the fresh air.

"I don't want to believe it, but what else is there?"

"Is that why you didn't show the Inspector the note you got?"

"I want to find Don first. I want to talk to him." Johnny was in full stride and I was hard pressed to keep even. "There has to be another explanation. If you knew Don Cleary the way I do, you'd understand why I say that. I can imagine a situation where he might kill Disco in a struggle. But not the wife and daughter. Not the dog."

"When are you going to tell me what Disco did to Cleary?"

"Right now," he said. "When Cleary was a Baytown cop, he happened to arrest Disco for a minor traffic violation. Emery was just driving through. Then he remembered the name and tied Disco in with a con

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job in Toronto. So he locked him up and called the Toronto cops to come for him."

"Emery a con man?"

"He had his little ways. The point is, he offered Cleary twenty thousand bucks to let him go. That was a mistake. Nobody bribes Don Cleary. But then Disco managed to slip a note and some money to a kid who brought in food from a restaurant. The result was, two friends of Disco's showed up pretending to be the cops who were coming from Toronto. Cleary fell for it and let Disco go with them."

"Okay, so Disco conned his way out of Baytown jail. Why didn't Cleary just put a routine tracer on him and forget about it?"

"Because it ate away at him. It was what everybody in town talked about for a long time. Cleary fell apart the winter after it happened. He disappeared for a while and we heard he was in Kingston sanitarium. He showed up next spring but they never took him back on the force."

"Poor bastard."

"Last I heard he was hustling beer at the Coronet Hotel."

It was rush hour on Sherbrooke Street when we got back down off the mountain. We had made a half-mile descent from heaven on earth into hell on wheels. The office crowd was heading for home in anything that would move. The roads were plugged with cars and the cars were packed with citizens, all windows open, all faces red and wet.

"Anyway," Johnny said, "the rap in Toronto—Disco squared that years ago. Everybody got paid most of what they invested and the book is closed."

"Does Cleary know that?"

"Don wouldn't want to know. There was a crime, there must be punishment. He could never bend an inch."

We were on Drummond Street. I followed Johnny into the Central YMCA lobby, heading for the long corridor that would lead us through to the exit on Stanley Street, a few doors above The Ninety-Seven. We were passing a bank of elevators when Johnny stopped dead. I piled into his massive back. He straightened me out and pushed me into one of the elevators just as the door was closing.

"Are we checking in?" I said. "I never knew you cared."

Johnny was not listening to me. In addition to the old guy handling the doors, there was one other man in the elevator. He was pale grey in color; that was what struck me first. In Montreal, in July, almost every-

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body carries some degree of sunburn but this long hollow face was made of parchment. His clothes hung on his bones. As he smiled at Johnny, pale green eyes flickered like lamps back inside his head.

"Dennis Masterson," Johnny said, "meet an old friend of mine from Baytown. Don Cleary."

The inside of Cleary's room on the tenth floor was untidy and the air was stale. There was no sign of a suitcase but a paper shopping bag lay on the floor, spilling a crumpled shirt. One rolled blue sock peeked out from under the bed. Johnny sat on the window ledge, blocking most of the light. "I got your note, Don. Sorry I wasn't in when you telephoned."

Cleary said, "No problem. I was surprised how easy it was to find Disco."

So there it was. The man was so crazy he was about to take credit for the slaughter. Nobody said anything for half a minute. Cleary lowered himself onto the bed as though he had learned a way to keep his bones from separating. This left the leatherette armchair vacant so I sat down in it.

"Why did you kill them?" Johnny said.

"I didn't."

"Come on, Don. We just came from there. We found them all dead."

"That's how I found them. They were all dead."

Johnny Fist looked at me across the room. He wanted to believe this maniac.

"Then I wonder who did kill them," I said.

"The Avenging Angel."

"The Avenging Angel," I repeated, just so it would be clear on the record.

Johnny said, "Nobody is going to believe you if you say that, Don."

"It's the truth. Anyway, Disco has paid the price. That's all I wanted." Cleary put the edge of a thumb to his mouth and gnawed the tattered flesh, his eyes glazed.

We let some moments pile up around us. Then Johnny looked hard at me and said, "You wanted to go to the can, didn't you, Denny? Don, why don't you be a gentleman and show my friend where the can is."

I almost said something but then I realized he wanted to search the room. We went down the hall, Cleary and I, wasted a few minutes in the lavatory, then headed back to the room. He went in first and when I

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followed him and closed the door, I saw Johnny was holding a pistol with a silencer on the muzzle. It was a long nasty-looking weapon.

"This was in your top drawer," Johnny said. When Cleary remained silent, he added, "The police said the shooting had to have been done with a silencer."

Now Cleary said, "Not my gun."

"It doesn't have to be your gun. Is it the gun that killed Disco?"

"It must be."

"How did you get it?"

"I took it from the Avenging Angel. We struggled, but I had the strength to prevail."

"I wish I could believe that."

"Believe it, Jonathan. God brought me to this city so that I could see the wicked brought to justice."

The scene was starting to spook me. Cleary was standing there, flickering like a candle in the wind and Johnny was hesitating, trying to swallow something that was stuck in his throat.

"I'm sorry, Johnny," I said, "but I think your friend is a sick man. And you are now holding the murder weapon. If you take my advice, you'll deliver Cleary and that gun to Number Ten Station."

"I guess you're right."

"Of course I'm right. And you'd better turn in that note he sent you. That's evidence. It's against the law to conceal it."

Cleary looked right at me then for the first time. He seemed to be admiring me. "Let's get the hell out of here," I said.

We were on Maisonneuve, about a block from the police station, when Cleary made a run for it. He was walking between us and nobody was holding onto anybody. Suddenly he was off into the stream, heading back the way we had come. For a man who looked like he was on his last legs, he sure had pace. Johnny made a token move to go after him but then gave it up.

"You let him get away," I said.

"What could I do? I can't move in all these people."

"Like hell. You should have had a grip on him in the first place."

Johnny Fist looked at me, his eyes full of amusement. "What are you so excited about?"

"The man killed those people. And you let him get away."

"Maybe he killed them, maybe he didn't."

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"Oh, come on, don't give me the Avenging Angel. It's him. He's a classic schizophrenic."

"So what if he is? What's it got to do with you?"

I had to think about that. After all, he was Johnny's friend, not mine. I'd never heard of Cleary before this morning. As for the dead Disco family, just read the papers. It's happening every day. Why was I so excited?

"He's a criminal," I said. "He broke the law."

Johnny smiled warmly. "I declare," he said, "you're starting to sound just like him." He headed back towards Stanley Street, his jacket pocket bulging. "Come on, let's get this gun put away in a safe place."

It's a funny thing how waves settle. I told myself when I came away from Emery Disco's backyard that I would never be able to get that scene out of my mind. Now here it was, two days later, with Cleary vanished from his YMCA room, and already I was getting on with the vital business of my life. Specifically, I was hovering around the piano in my apartment, hitting chords and performing my breathing exercises, hoping to extend my modest range by half a tone.

My telephone rang and it was Johnny. "Saturday morning without snooker pool is like a day without sunshine," he said.

"That's a good slogan." I said. "Why don't you sell it to the orange-juice people?"

"We'll shoot a game," he said. "Then if you want, you can stay with me while I go over and see Koshe. He has a quarterly statement for me to sign."

"Mervin Stein works on Saturdays?"

"It gets him out from under Mitzi and the kids."

Johnny and I met on the broad cement steps leading up to the third-floor level at Leader Billiards where all the snooker tables stand on a Saturday morning, shadowy and quiet under their dark green canopies. We selected cues while the attendant snapped on the light over table 19 and stamped our card in the time clock. I took it from him, paying at the same time for a couple of large Pepsis and four small bags of peanuts.

Jonathan led the way to the table, doffing his jacket, chalking his cue. "Who breaks?"

"Be my guest."

He slammed the cue ball into the triangle of reds with a powerful thrust

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of his cue. I waited until two red balls had dropped into pockets before I said, "No flukes off the break."

Johnny had been lining up his next shot but now he stepped back. "Go ahead," he said. "You'll need all the help you can get."

He was right. He made every shot on the table and I had to concede the first game by the time we got to the blue ball. In the second game, Johnny's attention began to wander. He missed a few shots and I made a good run that included three blacks, so when only the colored balls were left I was twenty points up. Then he was sitting staring at the table not seeing it.

"Your shot," I said.

He stayed where he was.

"The cops are saying it may be a gangland execution," he said. "Did you see the story in the *Gazette?*"

"Yes. But we know better, don't we? We met the Avenging Angel. We have this gun."

"Cleary could be telling the truth. He went there to arrest Disco—that would be his style. But he surprised the killer and took the gun away from him."

I looked at the oily floor and shook my head. "An experienced underworld hit-man gives up his gun to that walking wreck. Some scenario."

"Don't be fooled. Don is stronger than he looks."

"If it was a contract, the killer wouldn't make that mistake."

"They aren't that professional around here," Johnny said. "This isn't New York. Some of the local hoods are real meatballs."

I leaned my cue against the table and put my hands in my pockets. "Are we going to finish this game?"

"My mind isn't on it."

"Then who pays?"

"You pay. I haven't any money."

Johnny's business with his accountant took no time at all but we spent an hour in Stein's office anyway. It was a pleasant visit. Merv keeps a huge samovar on a table in his waiting room. The machine came from Russia with his grandparents who were smart enough to emigrate with dignity and their possessions before later generations had to leave on the run.

His girl made us tea and brought it into the office where we were sitting in deep black leather chairs on a white carpet around a low brass and

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glass table. The young lady had ebony skin and wore a wine velvet suit. She had gone to the trouble of cutting her hair very short and changing its color to ash blonde. She looked almost as splendid as Mervin himself, who was dressed in a powder blue suit with a white shirt open at the neck. He sparkled at the extremities with gold cufflinks and patent-leather shoes. His face was dominated by eyes as large and dark as ripe olives separated by a nose as bold as a monolith. His hair was a thundercloud.

"I understand why *you* work Saturdays," Johnny said, "but how do you get *her* to work Saturdays?"

"I removed a thorn from her paw," Stein said. "She'll do anything for me."

"Let's talk more about that," I said.

"No, let's talk about the murders," Johnny said. "Disco was a client of yours, wasn't he, Koshe?"

"For a long time."

"What do you think of the story in the paper today? Gangland execution."

Stein got up and went to the window and stood with his back to us, an elegant pose with one hand against the frame, his forehead balanced against his wrist. "It could be," he said. "Disco had enemies."

Johnny sat up in his chair and threw a quick glance at me. I got the message; not a word about Cleary.

"What enemies?"

Stein turned around. He cracked his long fingers at each of their many joints. "That's a matter of professional confidence, Johnny."

"Oh come on, Koshe, you aren't a priest. You don't hear confessions."

"Yeah, but if word gets around that I spill secrets, I could get hurt."

"Spill just this one. I won't say a word."

Stein looked at me. I said, "I'm Johnny's puppet. I only speak when he moves my mouth."

"Okay. I also do the books for the Riverboat lounge."

"Arnie Pender," Johnny said.

"I happen to know Disco was into Arnie for a lot of money and they were having trouble collecting."

"Money problems?" I said. "With that castle he lives in?"

"Don't be fooled. By the time the creditors are paid, the Disco estate will be a negative asset." Stein turned to Johnny. "It's possible they

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decided to make an example of him. Pender sent a gun around to hit Disco and the family showed up unexpectedly so he wasted them too."

His telephone rang then and it was his wife reminding him that he was going to take the kids to Westmount Park. His voice changed on us; it became a high-pitched, impatient harangue.

"Mitzi, I can't! I have people in the office right now. *You* take them. No, don't put Rodney on the phone. I can't talk to him now. Rod, tell your mother to come back on the line. Daddy is very busy today, Rod, you and Len will have to amuse yourselves. Well of course you can amuse yourselves . . ."

We left poor Mervin and took the scenic walk along Sherbrooke Street past the park, past Atwater Avenue with the Forum below us waiting for September so it could start packing in the hockey crowds again, past the red brick apartment buildings leading to Guy Street, and then past the rows of tiny shops with one dress or one painting in each window.

We arrived at The Ninety-Seven and I hated to go inside. Johnny held the massive oak door open for me, spilling out onto the sidewalk the metallic aroma of air-conditioning mixed with stale beer and a million exhaled cigarettes.

"Can't we go and sit in Dominion Square?" I asked him.

"Are you coming in?" He stood in the doorway, looking at me balefully out of the shadows. "I work here, remember?"

I followed him inside and soon wished I had not. Dallas met us at the foot of the winding staircase with an empty glass in his hand. He said to Johnny,

"Linda is on her third one of these. She started at noon."

"Shit a brick," Johnny said and began tramping up the stairs, his shoes clanging on the metal treads. I went to sit at the bar.

"Anything for you?" Dallas asked me.

"It's early for me."

"It's early for most people." Right from the start, Dallas had been immune to the charms of Linda Lennox.

For a few minutes, the dialogue between Johnny and Linda was muted. Then they began to play it like performers on a stage. Their voices came ringing down the stairway.

"I don't want you getting bagged in the morning. It makes you a pain in the ass by four o'clock."

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"How would you know? You're always out with your boy friend. When are you and Dennis getting married?"

Johnny talked low and fast for a few seconds. I suppose he was telling her I was downstairs. She sounded only a little restrained as she said,

"I don't care. It's true."

"What's wrong with you? You used to be somebody I could talk to. Now all you want to do is lush it up with that idiot Kingbright."

"He's a great relief after you. He doesn't just use me and walk away. Let go of me. I have to go to another man if I want any kind of consideration."

She came rattling down the stairway, her long skirt hitched up in one hand, her purse under her arm. There were tears on her cheeks and the dark eyes were a little out of kilter, as though she had been hit hard on the side of the head. Something was eating her up these days.

The place seemed awfully quiet after the front door banged behind her. For a few moments, the only sound was the squeak of Dallas's bar cloth on the rim of a glass. I got up and went to the foot of the stairs.

"Big John?"

"Yazzah!"

"How's about Dominion Square?"

"You go, old sod. I think I'll rest here for a while."

I stood listening to the silence, waiting for some further message from above. It came. The sound of one of Johnny's old .78 records on the machine. It was Duke Ellington, the poignant cry of "Lady of the Lavender Mist." If that was where Johnny Fist was going to be on this Saturday afternoon, it was noplace for me.

I did go to Dominion Square for a while, sitting on a bench, half in sun, half in shade, watching the people come and go through the main door of the Windsor Hotel. There was a rich, wet, green smell in the air. A lady in a print dress with a newspaper folded on her head threw a handful of breadcrumbs on the pavement and was mobbed by pigeons.

I spent the afternoon in Loew's, watching a science-fiction film. When I came out onto Ste. Catherine Street, it was the time of day I like best in summer. There was a mood of subdued tension among the tanned faces watching themselves as they passed the department store windows. I was torn between roaming for an hour or so, enjoying this idyllic mood, or heading back to The Ninety-Seven to see if Johnny had surfaced out of his indigo, lavender, turquoise pool of Ellington and introspection.

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In the end I went home and practiced my scales. Then I lay down and slept for an hour. When I got up and showered and put on a fresh suit, the sky was almost dark and from my high-rise balcony I could see nothing but lights in buildings, on streets and bridges and on chains of automobiles.

I taxied to the club, enjoying the delays in traffic so I could look out my window at the girls. I thought of Françoise, the script girl at CBC who three months ago had tired of waiting for me to get serious and had gone and married her college sweetheart. Maybe it was time for me to get involved again, to whatever extent I could manage.

The Ninety-Seven was as busy as it ever gets. All the tables were occupied, three chess games were in progress, and from the lower room I could hear the throb of electric guitars seeping through the double doors. I drank for a while and exchanged a brief greeting with Johnny, who was busy playing host.

Then, about eleven, there was a savage hammering on the front door, the sort of assault I associate with the arrival of Cossacks in the night. In the shocked silence somebody said, "It's a raid," and a few people laughed. When the locked door was opened by the nearest member, in walked Noble Kingbright clad in a floor-length cloak of black velvet and holding before him a sword, the pommel and guard raised high like a cross, his glittering eyes fixed on it so that he came on like Joan of Arc. The applause was enthusiastic and, I must admit, deserved. Full marks for artistic impression.

Having made his entrance, Kingbright confronted Johnny and said, "If you would grant me a membership in your tacky club, I would have a key and would not find it necessary to bash down your door."

Johnny unfolded his arms and let them hang at his sides but otherwise he did not move. "That is a dangerous weapon you're holding," he said. "It's against the law for you to have it with you."

Kingbright lifted the blade and looked at it, the way a man admires a well-developed muscle in his own arm. He ran his tongue along his teeth and I could hear how dry his mouth was inside. For the first time I sensed how very drunk he was. When he slipped the sword back into its sheath, the room let out its breath.

"To business," Kingbright said. "I am here because Miss Linda Lennox informs me she has left a certain notebook in the upper room. And since

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she has no desire to present herself in this location ever again, she has sent me to pick it up."

Johnny glanced at me. "Dennis, get the notebook."

I hurried up the winding stairs and found the book on the bedside table. It opened in my hand and I saw pages of scrawled handwriting—some sort of story Linda was working on, I assumed. When I got back downstairs, Kingbright was saying;

"The portrait I am posing for will be magnificent. Boulanger is a depraved man but a great artist. You must all come to the studio and see it."

I handed the notebook to Jonathan who passed it to Noble Kingbright. "There you are," he said. "What you came for."

Kingbright swept the notebook under one arm and strode to the bar, upon which he laid down his sword with a clatter. He reached into a pocket and drew out a fistful of money. Some of it fell to the floor, a careless litter of twenty-dollar bills. He tossed several to Dallas.

"Drinks," he roared, "for everybody within sound of my voice!"

Then he made a fast departure, with his sword sloped across one shoulder and his cloak billowing behind him. I followed Johnny to the bar and saw him give to Dallas the money Kingbright had dropped on the floor.

"Put that aside," he said. "I'll see he gets it back."

I said, "Where do you suppose he came into all the loot? He used to complain about being flat all the time."

"Who knows? Maybe the baronial Teutonic father sent his bastard son a birthday present." Then he said, "Let's drop in on Arnie Pender. I want to find out whether Koshe was onto something this afternoon."

The Riverboat lounge was halfway down Stanley Street towards Dorchester Boulevard. The doorman needed a shave, a clean shirt and a few lessons in brushing his teeth.

"Johnny Fist," he said, flinging wide the door and welcoming us into the pungent atmosphere of cheap perfume and beer-soaked carpet. "Why don't you come back and do your old radio show?"

"Them days is gone forever," Johnny said.

We stood for a moment in the doorway to the Bayou Room, looking for Pender. It was quiet in there; the prostitutes were buying each other drinks. All the action was in the main room where we could hear a rhythm-and-blues band scorching the paint off the walls and ceiling. Johnny led the way next door.

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The band was a swinging mass of screaming reeds and throbbing strings, playing so far above melting point that they had fused some time ago into one inseparable slab of sequined tuxedos and black skin. When the set finally came to an end, it would be necessary to cut the act up with an acetylene torch and haul it off the stage in sections.

Arnie Pender was nowhere in the main room, so we threaded our way along the side wall towards the doorway leading to his upstairs office. We went through, closing the door behind us, which reduced the level of music to muffled hysteria.

Ahead of us stretched a long narrow flight of wooden stairs. A young man in a double-breasted suit left his post at the top and doubled down to meet us.

"You can't come in here," he said. He was a new man; Johnny and I were strangers to him. He had a massive torso and his arms hung loose and slightly in front of him as though he was suspended from a hook in the middle of his back. This was no meatball. His skin was bronzed and his hair was oiled and he had sauna written all over him.

"It's all right," Jonathan said. "We're friends of Arnie." He made as if to go ahead.

"Nobody goes in," the bodyguard said. And here he made his mistake. He walked right into my friend and stepped on the toe of one of Johnny's shoes. Johnny grabbed him with both hands, one of them seizing the material of his suit at the belly, the other his shirt and tie at the collar. His feet were off the floor now and he was being run back up the stairs, carried over Johnny's head like a shield. Nor did the charge end on the top landing. Johnny kept right on going, using the body in his hands like a ram to burst open the door.

By the time I got into the office, Arnie Pender was standing up behind his desk with wide eyes and Johnny had set the bodyguard back on his feet. I could see broken fingernails on Johnny's left hand. Adrenalin is a wonderful thing.

"Tell your new man I'm a friend of yours," Johnny said.

We were introduced to the bodyguard. His name was Ernie and he came from out West where he had been Mr. Prairie Provinces. He gave us a prairie smile—bleak and flat—and left the room.

Arnie Pender sat us down and got us a drink from his cabinet. Pender is in his late fifties and he must carry close to 300 pounds on a frame not much taller than mine. When he moves, you'd think he had large sacks

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of water suspended inside the legs of his trousers. We were on our second drink when our host said,

"Why are you here, Johnny? You didn't come storming through that door just because you miss me."

Johnny opened up then about Emery Disco and, while Pender listened with his big face growing dark, my friend told him how he suspected it was a gangland hit.

"Not in my book," Pender said. "Even if somebody wanted to waste Disco, why go that far? It doesn't make sense." He considered. Then he said, "Why all the interest in Disco? I didn't know he was a special friend of yours."

"I'm interested because of something I heard today," Johnny said. "I was told Disco was into you and your backers for a lot of money."

"Where did you hear that?"

"It doesn't matter where I heard it. Is it true?"

Pender's easy smile had faded. "It's true. Disco owed the organization for a long time. We wanted him to find the money. Now we'll have to write it off." His smile returned. He said, "You don't have to tell me where you heard about the money Disco owed. I can tell you. Merv Stein."

"Koshe never said a word to me," Johnny lied to keep the peace. "I haven't seen him in a week."

Pender's smile became a grin. "Tell you something, John. If you're tracing murder suspects, take a look at Stein. He's a busy guy."

"You're kidding."

"Don't laugh. I happen to know Stein invests money for his clients. Only the way he does it, not all of it goes into secure stuff. Some of it he puts in high-risk ventures with better interest and when it works, he keeps a percentage."

Johnny shook his head but it sounded right to me. I always thought Merv had a swift, elusive look about him.

"Believe it, my friend," Pender went on. "Now suppose Stein had done this with some of Disco's money, only the risk turned sour. We were pushing Disco, I've admitted that. He'd be pushing Stein and Stein might have panicked."

Johnny put his hand on the telephone on Pender's desk. "Do you mind if I tell him you said so?"

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"Hey, yeah," he said. "That's beautiful. Call him and tell him I put the finger on him. I know he told you it was me."

Johnny dialed and waited. Then his face brightened and he said, "Hello, Mitzi, this is Jonathan. Can I speak to Merv for a mintue? Did he? No, he didn't say a word about it to me. No, there isn't any message. I'll talk to him when he gets back."

Johnny put down the phone and looked at Pender. "Koshe got on a plane tonight for London. I guess he got called away on business."

Pender put a fingertip beneath his left eye and drew the rim down, making the eye wide and innocent. "Yeah, sure," he said.

We were on our way down the narrow stairs when we heard the telephone ring in Arnie's office. On a hunch, Johnny paused and waited. We heard Pender's voice, muffled. In a moment the door opened.

"That was your bartender," Pender called down to us. "He just got a call from somebody named Linda Lennox. You know her?"

"Yes."

"Well, she says you better get right over to the Boulanger studio on St. Denis Street. Somebody went out a window."

They had taken Noble Kingbright's broken body away by the time we got to Boulanger's place. The artist works in a garret up four flights of crusty stairs. There was a uniformed officer on the top landing but we had no trouble with him. It was Lucien Lacombe. We first met Lacombe when he was playing shortstop for a Police Association fastball team. Since then he was playing for us.

"Hey, Johnny," he said, "did you know this guy?"

"He was a mutual friend of mine and Linda's."

"She's in there now." Lucien casually put a fist into my stomach and I responded with an appropriate flinch. "How's our good right fielder?"

"Getting run ragged these days. Too many people dying."

"It's a bad summer. First Milligan, then all those people in the swimming pool. Now this one."

Johnny asked what had happened. Lucien said it was all over when they got there. The jumper had been drunk and was swinging, of all things, an unsheathed sword. Like Willie Stargell at home plate, was how Lucien put it. Boulanger apparently tried to settle the man down and received a cut on the arm. He went away to borrow a bandage from a girl he knew downstairs. Then he heard more yelling and running in the loft

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and when he got back up, there was only the girl left in the room, standing by the open window with blood on her skirt.

"Thanks, Lucie," Johnny said. "I think I better go in and talk to her."

We encountered the Inspector on his way out of the studio. It was the same man who had seen us in Disco's back yard. We explained our connection with Linda and the deceased. We confirmed that Kingbright had been drunk and a little manic when he left The Ninety-Seven earlier in the evening. We also mentioned his conspicuous affluence with twenties all over the floor. This drew a satisfied smile from the police officer.

"That may wrap up the Disco killings. The girl tells us that Kingbright went to see Disco on the afternoon it happened. He was making a film and he wanted Disco to put up some money."

Johnny was keeping his mouth tight shut but his eyes were alive. The Inspector said,

"She tells us there was a pistol to be used in the film and that Kingbright had it with him when he went to see Disco. He didn't have it with him tonight but I've sent somebody to search his room. When it turns up, I think ballistics will show it was the gun that killed the Disco family."

I waited for Johnny to say he could assist the police in their search for the murder weapon, but he said nothing.

"So you believe the guilty man took his own life tonight," I said.

The Inspector nodded. "It seems logical, according to what the girl inside tells us."

He went away, taking Lucien Lacombe with him. Johnny and I went inside. He hurried to Linda while I stopped with Boulanger. The artist was standing in front of the unfinished portrait, frowning at it through half-closed eyes while he reamed a nostril with the tip of his little finger.

"This kind of work is really not my thing," Boulanger said. As support for this statement, a crowd of brilliant abstracts shouted at me from every side of the studio. "But he was a persuasive man. He made me believe I wanted to do it."

"Did he pay you for it?"

Boulanger turned pained eyes upon me. "That is an irrelevant factor now, wouldn't you agree?" he said.

Feeling I had said the wrong thing, I was glad to move away and approach Jonathan and Linda, who were standing now and talking. "He was raving," Linda said. "After he cut Paul's arm, he wouldn't stop laughing."

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"When I came earlier, it was like the man was in church. A priest," Boulanger said.

"We were here early," Linda said. "I kept telling Noble to calm down."

"He was on his knees in front of the painting," Boulanger went on, "like at a prie-dieu. The sword was stuck in the floor in front of him and he was chanting about being guilty of something."

"He wouldn't stop yelling," Linda said. "He kept on about guilt and punishment. I asked him if he was talking about the murders at the swimming pool. I knew he went there with the gun to talk to Mr. Disco. When I said this, he got worse and he began pointing the sword at himself."

Johnny took Linda by the shoulders and held her, shaking her to bring her out of it.

"He stabbed himself," she said, her breath bubbling in her throat. "He held the sword in both hands and he ran it into his stomach. He was standing right here." She pointed at the spattered boards below the window ledge. "Then he stumbled backwards and was gone."

I watched Jonathan bury the tiny girl in his arms and I said to Boulanger, more for my own benefit than anybody else's,

"Have you got anything to drink around here?"

He had half a gallon of red wine, imported at no great expense. We drank a good quantity of this out of the artist's rare collection of jam jars while sitting with our backs to Kingbright's half-finished portrait and listening to Linda as she calmed herself down.

"It all adds up," Johnny said finally, his gaze directed at the studio window, closed and bolted now that it no longer mattered. "Kingbright must have threatened Disco when he refused to back his film. I imagine the dog went for him and he shot it first. Then Disco himself. And then the wife and kid when they came out into the yard."

"Where did all the money come from?" I said.

Johnny hardly paused. "He took it out of Disco's pocket. Emery always had a lot of cash on him."

We said goodbye to Paul Boulanger and went outside to where Linda's car was parked. Johnny said to me, "This fits in with what Cleary said. He came along just after the shooting and took the gun from Kingbright."

"You see it that way?"

"I wish I could find Don and tell him he can stop running."

We climbed into the car and Linda took us on a swift erratic drive back

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to The Ninety-Seven. I declined Johnny's invitation to come in for a nightcap and left them to their reconciliation.

My taxi ride home was troubled. I wondered when I would suck up my nerve and tell Johnny his case against Kingbright had at least one obvious hole in it. I could not picture the hysterical killer searching the house for cash with four dead bodies in the back yard. And how could he have gotten the money from Disco's pocket? The dead Disco was wearing nothing but a pair of bathing trunks.

Linda Lennox took a couple of days off work to recover from her ordeal. For this reason, she didn't hear the news at the ad agency. I had to pick it up from Dallas, who got it off the street. It was my justification for going back to Johnny and telling him he was all wet about Kingbright being Disco's killer.

"How do you know?"

"The word is out that Kingbright misappropriated a pile of money from the office. Funds intended to be talent repayments for TV commercial performers. That, my friend, was the cash he was throwing around the club. It also explains all his talk about guilt."

Jonathan had brought a tray from the kitchen to Linda's bedside. He was doing everything now but feed her. It was a subservient side of the man I had not seen before and it made me uncomfortable. He said,

"Okay. But we know Kingbright went by himself to see Disco, and he had the gun with him. Right, Linda?"

"That he did."

"But Cleary claims he took the gun from whoever did the killing," I said. "There's no way he could have got it from a big man like Kingbright."

"Cleary. Who's he?" Linda asked.

I told her about the note, Cleary's motive for getting Disco, his presence at the scene, his possession of the weapon, his flight from our custody. An air-tight case.

Linda said, "I buy what Dennis is saying. I wouldn't look any further."

But Johnny kept looking, refusing to accept the obvious evidence against his old hometown buddy. That's why he was ready to listen the next day when Mitzi Stein telephoned, full of worry about the missing Mervin. Johnny put down the phone and said to me,

"Listen to this about Koshe. He hasn't gone to England on business.

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He's gone for good. I think that means he was doing what Arnie Pender said. Losing Disco's money in risky investments."

"Tell it all," I said. "Mitzi was going on a lot more than that."

"Koshe has been getting letters from London for a year or so. Since the last time he was there."

"And?"

"Okay, he and Mitzi have been sleeping apart for quite a while. So what?"

"So Mervin has a girl friend in London and he's gone to live with her. He had nothing to do with Disco."

"Could be. But it also could be what I said, with or without the girl friend."

I stood by helplessly while Johnny put through a call to Air Canada. As he made the booking, he raised his eyebrows at me. If something was going to happen, I ought to be with him so I nodded my head. "Two seats."

Seeing England was nice, but the search for Mervin Stein turned out to be a depressing episode I would have been happy to miss. All we had to go on was a name and a return address from the outside of one of the letters Stein had been receiving. A suspicious Mitzi had copied it down in case a divorce lawyer might one day need it.

The address was on Grosvenor Street. The name turned out to be a subdued, smooth gentleman with polished nails and manners. No, he had not seen Mervin Stein lately, but last year he had thrown a large party which the Canadian had attended. He was able to supply the name and telephone number of a mutual friend, a television writer, who had spent more time with Stein.

A call to the writer's answering service revealed that he was on the set at Thames Television in Teddington Lock. No, he could not be reached by telephone. But it was only half an hour by train from Waterloo Station.

"At least we're seeing London," I said later as we crossed the station concourse, avoiding squadrons of pigeons milling around a sign that said if we fed them we would be fined £100. Our train eased away from platform 9 and raced through slums, suburbs and green country, stopping at towns with good names like Wimbledon and Hampton Wick.

At Teddington, we rode a taxi to the Thames studios which were located in acres of green fields beside the river, in which hundreds of pleasure

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boats were moored. We found the writer, not on the set but in the cafeteria. He was a reedy young man with a shaven head and weary gestures.

"Oh, Mervin is here all right, but he hasn't been to see me. When you see him, tell him an old friend hopes he catches fire."

Besides a lot of bitchy sarcasm, we got from the writer the phone number of a hotel in West Kensington where Stein was said to be registered. Johnny asked me to call and to tell Merv I just happened to be in town. He was afraid his voice would panic our man if he was guilty.

From a call box in the studio lobby, I got through to the hotel. Yes, Mr. Stein was staying there. They rang his room and a lush feminine voice with a cultured English accent came on the line. She passed me on to Mervin.

"Dennis! How nice to hear your voice. When did you get in?"

The words were right but he sounded tense. I made arrangements to come and see him that evening. Then, on the train back to Waterloo, I justified Mervin's anxiety. "Sure he was nervous. He's left his wife and he's booked in there with this English broad. He'd be wondering how I'd take it."

"Or he's on the run and doesn't want to be found." Johnny's face was thoughtful. "Never mind this evening. We're going there as soon as this train gets in."

In a way, Johnny turned out to be right. Mervin-Stein was on the run from us, but not because he killed anybody. When our taxi let us out across the street from the hotel, we saw a willowy girl pulling a comb through long golden hair as she stood beside a couple of bags on the sidewalk. As we watched, Merv came out of the front door, putting away his wallet. He spoke to her, then he began looking for a taxi. That was when he saw us. He looked around, but there was noplace for him to go.

Johnny confronted him. "I think you killed Emery Disco, Koshe. You were gambling with his money in the stock market. You lost and you took the heavy way out."

"Not true, Johnny. I invested Emery's money, but it all came good."

"Then why the sudden departure?"

"It wasn't sudden. It's been on my mind for a long time. You wouldn't understand." Merv threw a reproachful glance at me.

"Try me," Johnny said.

"I've been buried in that life back home—the accountant and family

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man. It isn't me, Johnny. Never has been. It was all a big lie. Mitzi and I have been nothing for years."

"She said something about that."

"So it was stay there and die, or make a move. That's all. The real Mervin Stein has decided to let himself out of the closet."

I was watching Stein's companion. There was something about the shape of the jaw, the narrow hips in tailored jeans, the vaguely masculine posture. A slight shift of my point of view and there it was; despite the touch of lipstick, the haze of eyeshadow and the glistening hair, this was no woman. Mervin Stein was traveling with a very beautiful boy.

I nudged Johathan. He looked where I was looking and made the connection a lot faster than I did.

Merv caught our glances and with a defensive tone in his voice, he said, "This is Simon."

So Johnny and I got back on a plane for Montreal, lighter by a few hundred dollars, having learned the secret of Mervin Stein's new existence, which would be considered sordid or liberating, depending on your attitude.

When we arrived back at The Ninety-Seven, descending from the airport limousine in the wee small hours of the morning, we discovered that the next event in the mystery had been programmed to meet us.

Dallas was sitting in a chair holding an icebag to the back of his head. Around him lay the shambles of the club interior; books had been cascaded from shelves, cupboard doors ripped open and contents strewn about. We knew the upstairs rooms would look the same.

"I don't know how long I was out," Dallas said. "But whoever it was didn't touch the cash. I checked it."

Johnny examined the bartender's scalp. "Have you called the cops?"

"I was about to."

"Don't. I know what this is." He went behind the bar and twiddled the dial on the safe. He came back with the murder gun, long and evil. He looked at me.

"It must have been Don Cleary. He was after this. You were right all along."

"You admit that now?"

"It wasn't Kingbright. It wasn't Arnie Pender. It wasn't Mervin Stein." I never saw my old friend look so unhappy. "So I guess I'll have to face the obvious. Let's go find Don Cleary . . ."

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We used my car to drive to Baytown, a pleasant 200 miles, much of it beside the St. Lawrence River and the green mounds of the Thousand Islands, with their half-concealed roofs of millionaires' cottages. Baytown is a small place. It should have been easy to locate a well-known citizen like Don Cleary.

Our first call was at the police station.

"We've been looking ourselves," the man behind the desk told us. "We read about the Disco killings in the paper and when there was no sign of Cleary around here we put two and two together. Sent a wire to the Montreal police with a description. So far, no news."

I thought of that incriminating note Johnny had received and how much grief could have been saved had he gone immediately to the police. Again, I said nothing.

We tried the Coronet Hotel, a useless move. The beverage room where Cleary served beer was half full. We stopped for a couple of drafts and quizzed one of the waiters, a crimson-faced man with black leather hair that had a part down the middle half an inch wide. Red thread on his jacket pocket told us his name was Dave. Dave had not seen Cleary in over a week.

We even drove past Cleary's house, a berry-box cottage in a new development where, Johnny told me, the golf course used to be. He had spent childhood days in this area searching pools for lost golf balls and for tadpoles. Now we found Cleary's wife on her knees on the lawn, grubbing weeds out of a petunia bed. She had no idea where her husband was. If we found him, would we tell him there was no money in the house for groceries?

Johnny offered her twenty, but she refused it. As we walked away, a haunted-looking ten-year-old boy came out of the kitchen door unwrapping a popsicle. In the car on the way to his brother's place, Jonathan said, "I'm sorry, but I don't believe Mrs. Cleary."

"Why not?"

"She's an old friend of mine from high school. No reason for her not to take money from me if she was really broke. And the kid with the popsicle—I think that was bought at the supermarket today."

"Pretty thin evidence."

"Call it a feeling then. Cleary is around and she's covering up."

We carried our bags into the old Fitzwilliam residence, half of a frame duplex with hollyhocks standing along the side wall and a noisy fox terrier

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on his hind legs behind the screen door. I met Johnny's brother Merlin, who is the lone occupant these days. The dark rooms reminded me of a theater after the performance with the cast all gone away; here, amid the unsprung furniture, watched by broad Irish faces in old wooden frames, Jonathan Fitzwilliam had played out the early years of his life, becoming what he is.

Merlin fed us, then invited us to accompany him to the Armoury to witness a practice of the regimental pipe band in which he is a snare drummer. We were inclined to accept when the telephone rang. It was for Johnny.

"Hello? I knew you were. How did you know I was looking for you? I figured she would. Where are you now? Okay. Can we get in? Then we'll see you."

Don Cleary was at Pine Street Public School, hiding out in the basement. He used to do summer maintenance work there, painting floors and such, and had kept a key. His wife told him we were in town and for some reason he was ready to see Jonathan.

There was a smell of oiled floors and running shoes in the old school. Looking through open doorways into deserted classrooms, I expected to hear the bell signaling class changeover and then be trampled by hundreds of stampeding kids.

We found Cleary where he said he'd be, in the caretaker's cubbyhole beside the silent furnace room. He met us in the doorway, an embarrassed smile on his hollow face.

"I'm sorry I busted up your place, Johnny. I wanted to get hold of the gun."

Johnny produced it from his pocket, without the silencer on it now. It was the first time I knew he'd brought the weapon with him. "I should never have let you run away, Don. But the chase is over. Now I'm taking you to the police."

"Why?"

"To tell them what I know. The note you sent me. The fact that you were at Disco's that afternoon, and you were carrying this gun."

"But I didn't do the killing. I took the gun from the murderer."

My voice sounded loud in the concrete hovel. "If it wasn't you, Cleary, who was it?"

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He smiled at me. "I promised myself not to tell. The killer should be rewarded for doing God's work."

Johnny stepped aside and motioned with the gun towards the door. "Come on, Don. Let's go."

As we walked by, Cleary turned and was on the gun hand like a cobra. I was blocked out of the action in the narrow space. Johnny seemed hard pressed. He was using both hands to try to wrestle the gun away from Cleary. The man must have been possessed with superhuman strength.

"Grab his head!" Johnny yelled and I tried to squeeze past but it was too late. I saw the muzzle of the gun turning slowly, a dark eye looking for someone. I heard the ear-splitting roar that reverberated in the concrete box, was blinded by the flash, smelled the acrid, burnt powder.

It was over. Don Cleary lay on the floor with Johnny kneeling beside him. My ears cleared in time to hear the dying man's last words.

"That's why I wanted the gun, Jonathan. All I wanted was out."

A couple of weeks later in Montreal, things seemed to be looking up. Johnny Fist had somehow squared the police by telling what he knew about Don Cleary without revealing that he had been concealing the murder weapon. As far as they knew, Cleary had had it all along.

Then, to ice the cake, Linda Lennox came into the club late one afternoon to announce she was on her way to California. She was done with advertising in general and Montreal in particular. Film writing was her future, and the Coast was the place to be.

Johnny seemed ready to let her go and I was delighted. Visions of uninterrupted cribbage and snooker danced in my head. The good old life was coming back.

Linda went upstairs to pack some of her things. Johnny was totalling bar receipts and I was reading an ancient book of Victorian recipes with brown pages that crumbled like dried bay leaves. Then the door opened and in walked Mervin Stein. He looked a little shy, but clearer of eye than I had seen him in some time.

"I'm back," he announced.

We waited for him to say why.

"That scene over there wasn't working. I missed my kids," he said. "And in a crazy way, I missed Mitzi."

"That's nothing to be ashamed of," Johnny said.

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"I was hoping you wouldn't say anything about what I was into in England. She doesn't know I go that way."

"Not a word from us," Johnny said and I nodded.

Before he went away, Merv said, "How goes it with you, Johnny?"

"Changes, like everybody. I'm losing Linda Lennox. She's off to Hollywood to write movies."

Merv stuck out his lower lip. "Too bad Disco got killed. Otherwise, he might have backed the film she was writing here."

Our heads lifted as we listened to that new thought. Johnny said, "What film? Wasn't that Kingbright's film?"

"Yeah, he was directing but it was Linda's screenplay. In fact, it was a lot more hers than his."

"How do you know this?"

"Because Disco asked my advice about investing in it. Linda had put the proposition to him. I said films are risky but it was up to him. He told me he'd make up his mind when he talked to the girl. Apparently Linda and Kingbright were coming to see Disco that afternoon."

Merv went home and I followed Johnny upstairs. I didn't like the look in his eyes. We found Linda putting clothes in a bag. Johnny closed the lid, turned her around, held her in both hands.

"I just heard for the first time that you were with Kingbright when he went to see Disco. You never told me you were there."

"Why should I?" She pulled away from him, went to the wall.

"Because Don Cleary said he took the gun from the Avenging Angel. Most people think of angels as women. That never occurred to me before now."

"If you think I killed those people, you're crazy," Linda said. But her liquid southern accent would not cover the lie.

Johnny said in a very quiet voice, "You've nothing to worry about. The case is closed. Cleary is dead and the cops have hung it on him. I just want to know what really happened. For my own satisfaction."

Linda looked at me. "I'll talk to you. But not with Dennis here."

Johnny nodded at me. I made my way down the iron steps. It can't have been more than a few minutes before I heard a muffled scream and a thud. Then I heard heavy footsteps, a slamming door and silence.

I ran upstairs. The apartment was empty. They had to be on the roof. I opened the service door and ran up the final flight and out onto the flat asphalt roof. Johnny was standing by the edge. Alone.

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I walked to his side and looked down. Linda Lennox was lying in the stone-paved courtyard five floors below. I waited and then he started to tell me about it.

"She sent Kingbright away that afternoon because he was drunk and hyper. The gun was in her handbag. She laid the story of the film on Disco, poured her heart out to him. He not only refused to back the idea, he laughed at it. Said it sounded like kid stuff. Then he let her know he would be interested in her, but not as a writer. She took out the gun and threatened him. That was when the dog came at her and she shot it first. Disco tried to grab the gun and she shot him. Then when his wife and daughter came running, she had to kill them to protect herself."

I thought about this. "What about Cleary?"

"It was like he said. He came along just then and found Linda with the gun. She was dazed. He took it from her. Told her to go and sin no more. Then he put the bodies in the pool. Just to confuse the situation, I suppose." Somebody had parked a car in the courtyard below us. He saw Linda's body, looked up at us on the roof, and went away running.

"Another thing," Johnny said. "She killed Kingbright, it wasn't suicide. He was getting set to talk about her being with him that afternoon. She used the sword to topple him out the window."

In the distance we heard a siren. "But why this ending?" I said.

"It was the only way. She said she'd never admit to the police what she'd told me. And she laughed in my face. I thought of poor Don with all that crazy guilt on his mind. I saw her skating out of here, clean." He stared at his right hand. "So I hit her and brought her up here."

What bothers me most about all this is that Johnny Fist now seems at peace with himself. And I am the one with the load of heavy information I have to live with. I'm sitting now in the club nursing a beer and the busy night life is going on as usual. Mervin Stein and Mitzi came in and are two stools down the bar from me, pretending to be okay. But I see the expression on Merv's face when he glances at me. He's heard about what has been logged as Linda's suicide leap and he recalls Johnny's harsh reaction when he talked about her that afternoon.

So what do I do? Do I go to the police? Do I swallow the whole thing, no matter how it poisons me? I just looked up and saw Johnny Fist watching me from the far end of the room. There is a little smile on his face, as if he knows me better than I know myself.

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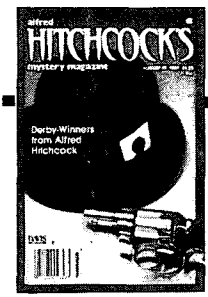

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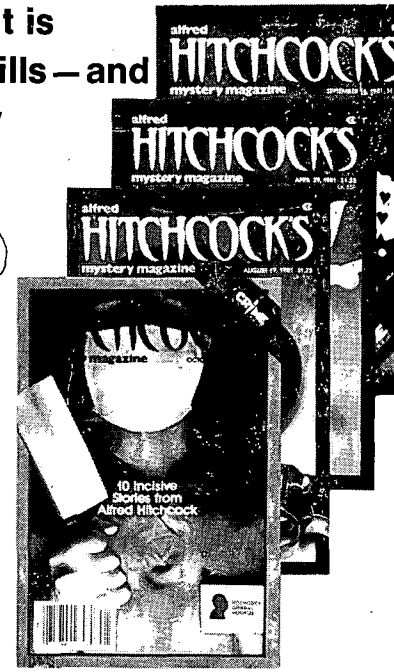

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